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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 5, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 5, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ACT

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition submitted by constituents in my riding of Calgary Midnapore. These individuals clearly care deeply about the welfare of animals and are asking that the sale and/or manufacturing of animal-tested cosmetics and their ingredients be banned in Canada moving forward.

PLASTICS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to introduce today, signed by many residents of Vancouver Kingsway and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

The first is a petition to establish a national strategy to combat plastic pollution. Many residents point out their concern that plastics are making their way into various bodies of water via storm drains and are interfering with our global ocean currents, and this is causing massive problems for species and bodies of water around the world. They call on the government to adopt a national strategy to combat this immediately.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is calling on the government to enact a Canadian public transit strategy that would provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit and establish funding mechanisms for

that purpose and to work with all levels of government to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term and adequate funding.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my final petition calls on the government to immediately implement public, comprehensive, universal pharmacare. It points out that 20% of Canadians are unable to fill their prescriptions due to cost, that people have to struggle to pay for the medicine they need, that Canada is the only country in the world with universal medicare that does not include prescription drugs and that we can save billions of dollars while covering every Canadian. They urge the government to follow the New Democrat plan and to do so immediately.

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning with an e-petition signed by 15,577 Canadians. When the petition started, it was not post-dated, as things now stand. They were calling on the government not to do what the government has done. The 15,577 residents of Canada were calling on the government to immediately halt plans to purchase the Trans Mountain pipeline or otherwise support its expansion. I submit that the petitioners would want it noted that they asked the government to take into consideration that shipping out raw bitumen is also shipping out Canadian jobs and that we do not know how to clean up a spill of diluted bitumen.

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by residents of Akwesasne.

[*English*]

The petitioners ask the government to provide funding for the clinical treatment of drug and alcohol abuse disorders for first nations, because drug and alcohol abuse disorders have significant impacts on first nations. People suffering from these disorders have a right to proper treatment and culturally appropriate treatment methods, and holistic approaches are essential to treat substance abuse disorders.

Business of Supply

They call on the government to make funding available immediately for treatment centres throughout Canada, such as in the White Pine Healing Lodge in Akwesasne.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition this morning that is a follow-up to a series of petitions I tabled in the fall calling on the government to invest in historic places in Canada, including with the reinstatement of \$10 million per year for the national cost-share program. The signatories come from across Ontario. I am pleased to present this petition on behalf of those interested in heritage in Canada.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table yet another petition from the residents of Winnipeg North in support of the government looking into the possibility of having a national pharmacare program for prescribed medicines and working with the many different stakeholders to somehow make that happen.

VISION CARE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to present two petitions in the House this morning. The first is from citizens calling on the government to commit to acknowledging eye health and vision care as a growing public health issue and to respond to it, particularly for Canada's vulnerable populations, namely children, seniors, diabetics and indigenous people, through the development of a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care, which will benefit all Canadians through the reduction of vision impairment resulting from preventable conditions and the modification of known risk factors.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I have the honour of presenting today has to do with the persecution of practitioners of Falun Gong in China and is particularly concerned with the apprehension of Canadian citizen Ms. Sun Qian, who was abducted by the Chinese government.

The petition calls for Canada to condemn the illegal arrest of a Canadian citizen for practising Falun Gong and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Canadian citizen Ms. Sun Qian.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (1010)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Minutes ago I was able to table first reading of our bill to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages across the country. This is a historic moment and a great initiative of co-development.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. minister, but of course, this is not a point of order. I understand, and I think members understand, why he wanted to do that, but it is not strictly a point of order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SINGLE TAX RETURN IN QUEBEC

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC) moved:

That, given:

(a) the House has great respect for provincial jurisdiction and trust in provincial institutions;

(b) the people of Quebec are burdened with completing and submitting two tax returns, one federal and one provincial;

(c) the House believes in cutting red tape and reducing unnecessary paperwork to improve the everyday lives of families; therefore,

the House call on the government to work with the Government of Quebec to implement a single tax return in Quebec, as adopted unanimously in the motion of the National Assembly of Quebec on May 15, 2018.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am truly proud to rise in the House to talk about the motion we moved today. I want to thank my colleague Pat Kelly, the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, for seconding it. He is also the Conservative revenue critic.

To begin with, allow me to read out the motion, so that everyone can understand the sizeable impact it could have on Quebecers if the government finally decides to drop its paternalistic, centralist approach and instead start listening to the public, the way we on this side of the House listen to the public.

The motion that we moved today is fairly simple, and I cannot understand how anyone could be against it.

I would like to give some background for those watching at home. This is not something we made up. It is a fact. The only place in Canada where people still have to fill out two tax returns is Quebec. This is a critical moment in Canada's history. For the first time, all of the political parties in Quebec—the right, the left, the federalists and the sovereignists—and members of the National Assembly from the regions and urban centres voted unanimously on May 15, 2018, to say that they want to do the same as the rest of Canada and fill out only one tax return in the spring. No one likes filling out their tax return, but we all have to do it.

That is what we heard from people on the ground. That is what MPs, senators and our leader, Andrew Scheer, heard. Our leader kicked off his “Listening to Quebecers” tour last April and wrapped it up two weeks ago with a 75-plus-page report. I myself tabled the report, which details what the people of Quebec's 17 administrative regions told us. We are not making any of this up. We are just moving a motion that addresses the concerns and the wishes of the people of Quebec and those elected to represent them in the National Assembly.

Acting on that evidence, at our first general council in Saint-Hyacinthe last May, the vast majority of Quebec members of the Conservative Party of Canada voted to pursue this matter even further.

Last August, during our national convention in Halifax that brought together 3,000 members from across Canada, Conservative Party of Canada members unanimously voiced agreement with this resolution to support Quebecers and the National Assembly's call to make their lives easier.

Is it not our job to simplify things for people, cut red tape and ensure that government is working for the people? Surely we are not here to serve the machinery of government and the Prime Minister's ambition, though that is apparently what the Prime Minister and the Liberals opposite would prefer, given how freely they spend our money. Does our money belong to the government? No, it is the people's money. Maybe we can talk about this more later, but the Prime Minister's never-ending deficits speak volumes.

●(1015)

The Conservative Party of Canada leader, Andrew Scheer, clearly stated—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona on a point of order.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the member referred to the Conservative leader by name, which is not allowed in the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe the member has understood. That was the third time he did so, and I allowed it, but I am sure the hon. member will avoid doing so again. I invite the member to continue.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize. I know the rules, but believe me when I say I got too excited about the upcoming election and I want to support my leader in everything he is doing. You are quite right, and I will try to be more careful for the rest of my speech.

The leader of the official opposition and, I must say, the future prime minister of Canada, has clearly stated that the day after a Conservative government is elected on October 21, 2018, we will begin taking steps with the Government of Quebec to ensure that all Quebecers, like the rest of Canadians, will have to file just one tax return in March, when they tackle the task in the spring.

The Liberals and NDP will engage in fearmongering on this issue. They will bring up all kinds of stories rather than listen to the people of Quebec. We on this side will continue working for the people, because the Conservative Party of Canada is a party that recognizes provincial and municipal areas of jurisdiction. We support decentralization and want to put decision-making powers back into

Business of Supply

the hands of citizens as much as possible, whether that be the patients, the clients, the entrepreneurs, the students, and so on.

The ultimate goal is to decentralize powers and make the process more effective and less expensive to make the public happy. That is our job here in the House. That is why people elected us. They elected us to manage the money they entrust us with.

Barely two weeks ago, during a meeting with the newly elected Premier of Quebec, I heard the Prime Minister say that he would address the issue. Just yesterday, I saw two ministers and a parliamentary secretary unequivocally reject the idea by basically telling Quebecers this will not be part of their electoral platform in October.

The good news is that an election is coming up and there are candidates working on the ground making a strong and serious case in response to the public's concerns. Our party is working hard every day to propose strong measures that also respect the distinct nature of Quebec society within Canada and provide additional tools to the Government of Quebec so that it may do its job for the people of Quebec.

Even as I give my speech, I hear our opponents whispering that these are merely electoral promises, but in fact, that is not the case at all. Conservative members have been very clear: the day after the October 21 election, once we are in power, we will begin taking steps with the Government of Quebec to ensure, once and for all, that we too can file a single tax return. We think it is ridiculous that our business people have to fill out and mail in two documents that have the same information. The same information is being input twice.

For our part, we believe in the expertise of our federal and provincial employees. They are capable of sitting down together and finding solutions for Canadians. That is what we do in committee when we have discussions, go out into communities and talk to people to find solutions that improve their quality of life. The Liberal government, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Liberal caucus, in particular the Liberal MPs from Quebec, who did not stand up to tell their Prime Minister that that is what Quebecers want, do the complete opposite.

●(1020)

I encourage them stand up today and say that this makes a lot of sense. We will work on getting the Prime Minister to listen to reason, to common sense. He needs to understand that we work for the people and not for the government or for our own interests. That is not why we were elected.

Business of Supply

Right now, the Liberal government is increasing the cost of living for Canadians by creating the carbon tax and by eliminating the public transit and the sports and culture tax credits. This is important to note, since people need to understand that it was this Liberal government that eliminated these tax credits.

This government also tried to tax the little perks of working in the restaurant industry. Some restaurant employees receive a free meal during their 30-minute break, and the government tried to tax this meal. Why did it do this? The government tried to tax these meals so that it could take even more money from Canadians. That is the reality. No matter how you look at it, the government tried to do this simply because our Prime Minister does nothing but spend, spend spend.

In all of his debates and speeches during the 2015 election campaign, the Prime Minister and the Liberal members repeated over and over that they would run a modest \$10-billion deficit for the first two years in order to invest in infrastructure and that they expected to return to a balanced budget by the end of their term. This government inherited a \$1.9-billion budget surplus, yet its total deficit now stands at more than \$80 billion.

What does that \$80 billion represent? Everyone in the House throws these big numbers around, but we do not really understand what they mean. Let me give an example. One year's deficit amounts to about \$20 billion, which is how much it would cost to build 50 NHL arenas. That is 50 hockey arenas like the Videotron Centre or the Ottawa Senators' arena. The Prime Minister's irresponsible spending over the span of a single year is equivalent to the cost of building 50 arenas. At a rate of 50 arenas a year for four years of deficits, that adds up to 200 arenas. The way things are going, every city in Canada could have its own NHL arena. That is outrageous.

The Prime Minister naively suggested deficits are not so bad, they pay for themselves, just like budgets balance themselves. We know better. We all keep budgets. We all work hard for our money, like the people who sometimes struggle to make ends meet. A deficit or a loan has to be paid off. Who is going to pay for the deficits? The public, workers, parents, citizens, and businesses, that is who.

Businesses are trying to create jobs, but they are stuck with a government that is sabotaging all our international relationships. Every business is worried because our relations with China, the United States and India, key players in our economic development, are at risk.

The current government is trying to take more money out of Canadians' pockets to pay for its reckless spending. Let me go even further. Anyone who has been following my work since 2003 knows that it was this type of situation that drove me to get into politics in the first place. I have always said that one of my primary motivations was to work on managing our public finances. I have three children. Most members of the House have children. Our children just want a better world and the same opportunities we had to accomplish their own goals.

The problem is that this Liberal government and the Prime Minister are burying our children and our grandchildren under a huge pile of debt, running recurring deficits with no plan to balance the budget. I do not know how many times my colleagues, our leader

and I have asked the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance if they could at least table a plan to balance the budget.

• (1025)

When someone wants to buy a new house, a cottage or a new car, they go to the bank and meet with a financial advisor. They ask if they can borrow some money. The advisor asks them whether they have any collateral. Would a bank lend someone money without coming up with a plan for that individual to pay back the capital and the interest? Never. No one can get away with that, except the Prime Minister, who is managing our money so irresponsibly.

As time goes by, I think that Canadians are starting to realize that. It is a good thing that the election is approaching. On October 21, Canadians will have the opportunity to decide whether they want to spend another four years with this Prime Minister, who manages the public purse this way. The answer is no.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, people are applauding to show they are happy to say “no”. That is the reality. The party is over.

We are going to clean house. We are going to put money back in Canadians' pockets. We are going to work to make life easier for Quebeckers and Canadians, workers and business people, those who invest their money to create jobs and to support Canadians so that they can achieve their ambitions.

What became evident on this tour was that Quebeckers want a single tax return. We also heard proposals that would benefit everyone, such as prohibiting the dumping of wastewater into our waterways and our environment. In Quebec alone, there have been 62,000 incidents of wastewater discharge into our waterways. We want to put a stop to that.

We want to sit down with municipalities and experts. We want to invest in infrastructure, unlike the current government, which waited until the last year of its term to start making announcements about such projects. The Liberals waited for three and a half years. They talked. Now they are recycling old announcements about projects. Just yesterday, near my riding, they announced an investment in a Revenue Canada building that will not be made in the near future, but in 2024. What kind of timeline is that? It is not even in this mandate. They had four years to make their announcement. It is not even in the next mandate, but in one later in the future. That makes no sense.

On the plus side, at least it will be a Conservative cutting the ribbon, because Canadians have had enough of this government and this Prime Minister.

Business of Supply

We want real solutions that will improve the lives of Canadians, which starts with this resolution. Today we moved a motion calling on the government to immediately work with the Government of Quebec to implement a single tax return for Quebecers as soon as possible. Otherwise, we will take care of it on October 21. We will get things moving and support the public.

• (1030)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. He is talking about a single tax return for Quebec. We are talking about more than 5,500 Canada Revenue Agency employees, most of whom work in the regions of Quebec.

How do the Conservatives plan to save the more than 5,500 CRA jobs in Quebec?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of National Revenue for her question. It is a very relevant question, but I do sense something a bit vicious about it, since it implies that we want to eliminate these jobs. The answer is a categorical no. Our leader has been clear that this initiative is in no way intended to cut jobs. Its only purpose is to make people's lives easier.

The reality, which they will not admit, is that these highly skilled Canadian government employees, whom I thank for the work they do every day, do not just process tax returns. Their job also involves recovery and other problems that have to be taken care of, as the minister knows full well. This goes for Quebecers and for all Canadians as well. There is an important issue that she has not managed to address in the three and a half years she has been Minister of National Revenue, and that is tax evasion in tax havens. These employees could use their expertise to go after that money and increase the Government of Canada's revenues, which will allow it to fulfill its commitments and do the work it needs to do for Canadians across the country.

I repeat, we have no intention of cutting jobs, despite what the Liberals will keep repeating day after day until October 21.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The NDP supports the idea of simplifying Quebecers' lives, and we adopted a resolution calling for a single tax return during our federal convention. However, we included one very important clause: the implementation of this idea must not result in a loss of employment for Quebec workers in regions such as Mauricie and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean.

How is the member going to take this work, much of it seasonal, away from workers without cutting any jobs? We have done our homework, we have done the analysis, and that looks like a pipe dream.

I would like the member to comment on that.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question, which I find rather strange. Not even a year ago, he was bragging about this at the NDP national convention in Quebec. I could show you newspaper articles to prove it. Members of the NDP were getting all worked up saying that they wanted a single tax return without any job losses. That is what we want too. Then, someone somewhere tried to scare people and all of a sudden the

members of the NDP changed their tune and decided to side with the government.

I repeat: no jobs will be lost. That is the last thing we want. When we toured Quebec, individuals and business people across the province told us that it is ridiculous that they have to fill out two forms. I personally participated in that tour. I travelled over 10,000 kilometres and I visited those two regions. Why would Quebec not be able to make this system work when it works for the rest of Canada?

Quebecers are proud, and we are saying that we are going to keep our promises. We will not change our tune because someone tells us that jobs will be lost. The government is the employer. The government will be a Conservative government, with our leader leading the troops.

Our leader has been clear. The day after the October 21 election, we are going to begin working with the Government of Quebec, as per the National Assembly's unanimous request, to ensure that Quebecers only have to file a single tax return and that no jobs are lost in those two centres.

• (1035)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear the member opposite repeat himself over and over again, yet he never has any answers. We are asking him once again what his plan is to preserve these jobs, to strike a balance while also saving money, as the Conservatives have promised. As with the environment, there is no plan. He mentioned waste water. Once again, what is their plan, apart from saying they are going to resolve the issue, that they are travelling around Quebec and they are going to solve the problems?

What the member is doing is preaching, and interestingly, this is an election year. In an election year, the Conservatives are offering something to Quebec and refusing the rest of Canada the same thing. I look forward to seeing what happens in the rest of Canada.

What is happening? Does the member opposite, my colleague, have an answer? Will he share his plan with us? We are still waiting for the Conservatives' plans. I look forward to a plan.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, forgive me for smiling. I should stay serious because this is a serious issue. Every time I hear members on the other side of the House talking to us about plans, I laugh. The Liberals spent the election campaign telling us about plans and promises and they did not even keep them; but they are in charge, they are in power.

I want to go over some history. The word "history" makes it seem as though it is far away. I could talk about the Liberal sponsorship scandal, but I will not go that far back. In the current mandate, the Prime Minister and his ministers repeated about 1,000 times in the House—not to mention all the times they kept saying it during the campaign—that the 2015 election would be the last one under the current electoral system. What happened? That is a broken promise.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister repeated over and over again throughout the campaign—just as every other Liberal MP parroted it on the campaign trail—that he would balance the budget in 2019, after running small deficits in the first two years to invest in infrastructure. Where are we at? All the facts are there: we will not return to balanced budgets in 2019. Our children will have to pay.

The Liberal member wants to lecture the opposition even as we point out the Prime Minister's shortcomings, mistakes and failures and suggest that Canadians will have to pay for his incompetence. We will offer Canadians a serious option. We will clean up this House on October 22, the day after the election.

[English]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our hon. colleague for bringing forth this motion. It is laughable to hear the message from those across the way. Much as the seven members of Parliament from Newfoundland stayed silent on other issues, the 14 members from Quebec have stayed silent about the millions of litres of raw sewage that has been dumped into our rivers, lakes and streams. They have been silent in terms of the single tax form for Quebec.

Our hon. colleague has brought forth an incredible motion. Not only does our leader stand up and say what he is going to do in Quebec, but he says the very same things consistently all across our nation. He said the same in B.C. He said the same things right across our nation. That is unlike the member for Papineau, who is now our Prime Minister, who said a lot of things in 2015 to get elected, but seemingly forgot them.

Could our hon. colleague talk about the deafening silence from the 14 members of Parliament from Quebec?

• (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I am glad he brought up the fact that our adversaries are trying to scare everyone and make people believe a number of unfortunate things. The fact is, we do not change our tune.

If there is one thing the Conservatives are known for, it is doing what they say they will do. The Liberals say things but do not follow through. Sometimes they even do other things entirely. Because of their incompetence and their failures, people will end up paying more. Those are documented facts. People are paying more now and have to deal with more red tape under this government.

The Liberal government has had three and a half years to implement its agenda, but it has not done so. Our party will keep its promises from coast to coast, from east to west and west to east. On October 21, we will follow through and make sure that all Canadians, including Quebecers, need fill out only one tax return. It is in their best interest. We will do what people expect of us.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives are playing politics by making empty promises that they have no intention of fulfilling.

My colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable—who, I should point out, was mayor of a single-industry town in a region of Quebec that was

hit hard by a difficult employment situation—has been accusing me these past few days of fearmongering regarding the single tax return.

What we are saying is that we are always prepared to work with the Government of Quebec to make life easier for Quebecers, but we will not blindly do so at any cost.

The Conservatives would rather use fear, instead of science and thoughtful action. As I told my colleague yesterday, I need only remind the House of when the Harper Conservatives tried to bring in their EI reform. The reform forced workers to find jobs that paid 30% less, were far from home, and were in fields unrelated to the workers' skills.

I remember that their human resources minister misled Canadians, saying that her investigators did not have a quota to meet. However, Le Devoir got its hands on an internal document from her department, which stated that each investigator had been tasked to recover \$485,000 a year from seasonal workers.

That creates a climate of fear.

When I see the Conservatives ready to dive head first into a matter as complex as Quebecers' income tax returns and ready to do anything for a few votes, it takes me back to the era of the Harper Conservatives.

It will come as no surprise to realize that today's Conservative Party is prepared to leap into this single income tax proposal without doing any studies or collecting any facts. One would think that they learned their lesson given the results of the last election, and yet, away they go again as though they need Canadians and Quebecers to tell them once more that they are not interested in their reforms. That is quite all right. There is another good opportunity coming along this fall.

Contrary to what the Conservatives would like people to believe, we are not fixated on one option. We are open to having discussions, but with the facts on the table. We are not going to dive head first into a lake without checking how deep it is.

If the Conservatives were serious about simplifying Quebecers tax return, they would not have cut Canada Revenue Agency services. Over a 10-year period, they cut staff, stopped mailing income tax forms to Canadians' homes, closed service counters and cut call centre hours.

We are not the only ones saying so. I would like to quote a report by the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada entitled "Undermining Tax Fairness":

The single most destructive event occurred as a result of the 2012 budget when, in one fell swoop, \$250 million and 1,200 jobs were cut from CRA's budget. All told, successive austerity initiatives resulted in almost \$900 million in projected cuts and the scheduled elimination of almost 3,000 jobs.

I will take no lessons—and I mean none—from the Conservatives on improving services to Canadians. Today the Conservatives are trying to say that one measure alone will make it easier and more accessible for Quebecers to file their tax returns, namely, instituting a single tax form in Quebec.

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●(1045)

They are wrong. Currently, the federal government, nine provinces and the three territories have harmonized their definition of income. Quebec has different definitions, different rules and different exemptions. To have a single tax return in Quebec, either the federal government, the nine provinces and the three territories would have to harmonize their framework with that of Quebec, or Quebec would have to harmonize its framework with that of the rest of the country. Are the Conservatives going to have the same message in Montreal as they do in Edmonton? I doubt it.

What is the Conservatives' real plan other than to buy Quebecers' votes? Spoiler alert: they have no plan, just like they have no plan for climate change.

The Canada Revenue Agency employs more than 5,500 people in Quebec and is a major economic driver in towns such as Shawinigan and Jonquière. Let me be clear: unlike the Conservatives, we are not going to jeopardize those jobs. Yesterday I was in Shawinigan along with my colleagues, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, to announce the construction of a new building that will house the 1,350 or more CRA employees in Mauricie.

We delivered a very clear message to the Agency's employees and their families. I would also like to say that we reassured the employees we met yesterday, unlike what the Conservatives are doing. They are sowing fear. We are investing in Shawinigan because, unlike the Conservatives, we believe in the importance of maintaining and creating decent jobs in Quebec's regions. My colleagues and I are working hard to improve the quality of life of Quebecers, no matter where they live.

That is why we have reached out to our Quebec counterparts by making ourselves available to them. We have initiated bilateral discussions and confirmed our commitment to continue a constructive dialogue based on co-operation and respect. Most importantly, we have confirmed our commitment to action and results.

Since 2015, our government has increased major federal transfers to Quebec by \$3.3 billion. Today, these funds amount to nearly \$24 billion. As part of our commitment to protecting infrastructure, our government has pledged to lend \$1.28 billion over 15 years to fund the Réseau Express Métropolitain, REM, a major rapid transit project that will provide the Greater Montreal region with a more efficient and environmentally friendly means of transportation. This loan is administered by the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

We have reached an agreement to transfer responsibility for the ports of Gros-Cacouna, Rimouski, Matane and Gaspé to the Government of Quebec. We will provide \$163 million to help with the operating and maintenance costs of these ports. This transfer will take effect on March 30, 2020, and it will certainly benefit us at home, in the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands.

In December, we announced that our government would invest \$230 million in SCALE AI to create nearly 16,000 jobs in this Montreal-based artificial intelligence innovation centre. This initiative is at the heart of the strategy of—

●(1050)

[English]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I fail to see the relevance of the minister's comments on the motion under discussion today. The minister is rambling on about investments or some could say the Liberals' intent on buying votes in the Quebec area.

The discussion today is germane to the motion put forward by our hon. colleague. I would like to see if the minister could get back on topic.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will leave it to the hon. minister to continue her speech. I am sure she will come around and make a point of it. I have heard different things said in the House that go in different directions, but the speaker often comes back to the topic. I am sure she will make a point soon and close in on where she is aiming.

The hon. minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, this initiative is a key component of the government's export diversification strategy, and it provides irrefutable proof of our support for Quebec's artificial intelligence sector.

As part of our efforts to improve infrastructure across Canada, we plan to invest upwards of \$7.5 billion in major infrastructure projects in Quebec over the next decade. Furthermore, in 2018-19, Quebec should receive \$504 million for municipal infrastructure.

By 2023, \$293 million could be injected into strategic initiatives in Quebec under the Canada-Quebec bilateral agreement implementing the Canadian agricultural partnership. Sixty per cent of the funding will come from the Government of Canada, and 40 per cent will come from the Government of Quebec.

The Government of Canada will provide \$2.5 billion by 2022 for home and community care under the Canada-Quebec asymmetrical agreement on health care funding.

We have also made a commitment to transfer more than \$262 million to the Quebec government between 2017 and 2020 under the Canada-Quebec asymmetrical agreement on early learning and child care.

We are negotiating new agreements to improve the employment and housing situation in the province. We proposed an investment of over \$5 billion for training and skills development in Quebec between 2017 and 2023, as well as an investment of nearly \$2 billion over the next 10 years to help respond to housing needs.

When it comes to immigration, under the Canada-Quebec accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of aliens, the Government of Quebec received \$490 million in 2017-18. Negotiations are under way to compensate Quebec for costs related to the temporary accommodation of asylum seekers in 2017 and 2018.

Business of Supply

These are just a few examples of completed, in-progress or proposed funding and partnership programs that the Government of Canada established with the Government of Quebec. We will continue to work in close co-operation with the province to strengthen Quebec's economy and improve people's lives.

Efforts to restore and strengthen ties between the Canadian and Quebec governments have been very successful on several fronts.

Rather than making empty promises, we, on this side of the House, will continue to invest in services that make a real difference in the lives of Quebecers.

We on this side of the House know that access to services is what really matters, regardless of where one is in the country.

It is with that objective in mind that Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec have long been working together as part of a collaboration that dates back nearly 30 years. This long-standing collaboration allows the two agencies to share best practices and ensures that all recipients of benefits across Canada receive the best possible service.

Contrary to what the Conservatives would have us believe, collaboration with Revenu Québec is based on a solid foundation and has resulted in concrete improvements for Quebecers.

Collaborative efforts between the two agencies resulted in new, secure self-service options that were introduced in October 2018 for GST registrants in Quebec.

To date, the new service has resulted in over 1.5 million transactions, which is a huge step forward for businesses. Such progress would not have been possible without that close collaboration.

I would also like to point out that Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for administering a fair and efficient tax system that serves all Canadians, including the residents of Quebec.

It is with that objective in mind that Canada Revenue Agency has implemented a number of new services designed to make it easier for all Canadians to file their tax returns.

• (1055)

Many of these new services are designed to improve access for Canadians who file their tax returns electronically. It is clear that Quebec residents are also benefiting from these improvements, as more than 85% of Quebec taxpayers file electronically. Many services such as auto-fill my return, file my return, express NOA and ReFILE have already been put in place to make it easier for Canadians to file their returns.

Other benefits for Quebec residents include updates to the tax preparation software to make it easier to complete both forms. The basic information that is the same for each form can be automatically generated using the new features. That is what co-operation with Quebec looks like.

The important thing is to ensure that Canadians receive the best possible services so that they can easily file their income tax returns and receive the benefits and tax credits they are entitled to. We will never renege on that commitment.

Where were the Conservatives for 10 years? They were certainly not in the Gaspé or the Magdalen Islands. For 10 years, they terrorized seasonal workers in my riding by treating them like criminals, when all they did was apply for employment insurance. For 10 years, they totally ignored our crucial fishing sector. For 10 years, they neglected rural infrastructure. For 10 years, they treated the people in my riding like second-class citizens. That is the Conservative legacy for people here and other regions of Quebec. There is no difference between the Harper Conservatives and today's Conservatives.

It was their leader himself who said he was "Harper with a smile", "Harper 2.0". That is scary.

In the coming months, we will see two categories of Conservative promises: promises in Quebec and promises in the rest of Canada.

Divide and conquer is the same tactic that Canadians rejected in 2015, and it is the same tactic that they will reject again in October.

• (1100)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to remind Canadians that it was our party that launched the debate a year and a half ago in Quebec on whether Quebecers would like to continue using two tax returns or whether it would be better to have a single tax return like everyone else in Canada. We initiated the debate and our—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. There seems to be a technical problem with interpretation.

I am told it is working again. The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent may continue with his remarks.

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the issue.

[Translation]

I am pleased to remind parliamentarians and all Canadians that it was our party that began the debate in Canada a year and a half ago with our "Listening to Quebecers" tour. It was our party, gathered for a provincial convention with nearly 500 people, that decided to propose the idea of having a single tax return. After that the four parties at the National Assembly voted in favour of our proposal. Then there were the 3,000 party supporters from coast to coast, from British Columbia to Newfoundland, the vast majority of whom, or 90%, voted in favour of this proposal. Contrary to what some are saying, people in Vancouver, Quebec City, or St. John's, Newfoundland, are saying the same thing in English and French.

Business of Supply

Earlier, the minister spoke about the good relations between Quebec and Ottawa and between Ottawa and the premier. I am not sure that the Minister of Revenue heard what her boss said earlier. He was, once again, fearmongering, saying that jobs would be lost. Our leader, the future prime minister of Canada, was very clear, just 10 days ago in Montreal. No public servants will be laid off. Anyone who claims the opposite is flat out lying.

Why does the minister think that everything is going well with Quebec, when this morning, her leader, her Prime Minister, and, unfortunately ours for the remaining months, once again sowed the seeds of fear in Quebecers and directly attacked the duly elected Premier of Quebec?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, the federal government, nine provinces and the three territories have harmonized their definitions of income.

As I said in my speech, Quebec has a different definition, different rules and different exemptions. For Quebec to have a single tax return, the nine other provinces and the three territories would have to amend their framework or else Quebec would have to amend its own.

Which option do the Conservatives prefer?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her remarks. Not all ministers participate in debates on opposition motions.

Nevertheless, my question is about the Minister of National Revenue's, the government's and the Prime Minister's lack of openness to this idea. The NDP has been on board since this debate began, which was long before the Conservatives moved their motion—regardless of what the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent may think. We adopted a motion about this at our federal convention on February 17, 2018, which was well before the Conservatives began to take an interest.

We have been open to this idea, but the Minister of National Revenue and her government have not. They have never wanted to consider the possibility or talk to the Government of Quebec about it. They have no interest in discussing it, just as they had no interest in constitutional talks when the Government of Quebec broached the topic a few years back. The Liberals just slammed the door in Quebecers' faces then, and they are doing the same now with respect to a single tax return for Quebec.

Why is the minister so condescending when it is time to talk to Quebec? Why does she believe that Ottawa is always right and that she always has to have the last word? Why was she not more open to having a discussion on this issue rather than slamming the door shut when Quebec first floated the idea?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, there was no condescension on my part. As a Quebecer, I will also not be condescending towards myself.

If my colleague has listened carefully to what I said, he knows that we have worked with Revenu Québec for 30 years. We held two joint consultations with Quebec small businesses, one in 2016 and another in 2018. We exchange information in order to improve services for Quebecers and Canadians.

● (1105)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to remind members that they need to be in their seats in order to speak. Otherwise I cannot recognize them, and I would not want them to rise for nothing.

The hon. member for Edmonton West.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of National Revenue for an excellently read speech. I am sure this morning is the first time she has seen it.

She went on and on, as she has in previous times in the House, misleading Canadians by stating that the Conservatives cut positions to the CRA. I have a document here from the Library of Parliament that shows that from when the Liberals took over from the Conservatives, they cut 800 jobs, and the minister's own departmental plans—which I am sure she had not even read, although she signed off on them—show further cuts next year of 700 jobs.

I wonder why the minister continues to stand in the House and mislead Canadians on the facts.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I wonder why the member opposite feels the need to engage in personal attacks and assume that the minister has or has not read certain documents. That is disgraceful and unbecoming of a member of Parliament.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid that is not a point of order. That is more debate.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I am sure that if you seek it you will find the unanimous consent of the House to table the document my colleague mentioned.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, I would like remind the member opposite of something. We were talking about tax evasion earlier. Suddenly the Conservative Party wants to champion fighting tax evasion, although their former national revenue minister, Mr. Blackburn, publicly stated that it was not even a priority for the Conservatives. In our current mandate, we hired 1,300 new auditors to work on combatting tax evasion, and unlike the Conservatives, we have invested nearly \$1 billion.

I will take no lessons from them regarding services. They cut volunteer services, which help the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society, people who cannot afford to hire accountants. When it comes to services, I will take no lessons from them.

Business of Supply

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his speech, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska bemoaned the elimination of the public transit tax credit. However, that tax credit attracted widespread criticism, including from Équiterre, because it was not fulfilling its objective. It cost \$1,000 to reduce one tonne of greenhouse gas, whereas a carbon credit costs \$15 on the carbon market.

Why would we trust a party that pays \$1,000 for something that costs \$15 on the free market? Why would we download version 2.0?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives claim that no jobs will be lost. However, Premier Legault admits that jobs will in fact be lost. I want to come back to the Conservatives' plan. What is the Conservatives' plan for the regions? Yesterday, I met with 1,300 employees, not jobs, but human beings, parents with families. Most of them were women who were scared and worried about losing their jobs. We went there to reassure them, because we need these Quebec employees to serve all of our francophone Canadians. There are francophones in every province and territory. Quebec is home to the largest Canada Revenue Agency division capable of offering bilingual services.

• (1110)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to speak to the opposition motion moved by the Conservatives. I, too, moved a motion yesterday, but on a different matter. I am pleased that the Conservatives are changing the subject. They are obsessed with taxes, a balanced budget and the carbon tax. They are always harping on these three topics, but there is never a substantive debate or any concrete proposals. They just keep rehashing ideas.

That is why they deserve some credit for deciding to debate a very interesting subject. Much has been written publicly about this issue, which has drawn the attention of several stakeholders, especially the Government of Quebec. The National Assembly of Quebec has also taken an interest in this matter. The Conservatives are finally interested in having a serious debate on an important issue, rather than fruitless debates on the same subjects every day.

The idea behind the single tax return is that Quebec taxpayers would be treated the same as taxpayers in the other Canadian provinces and territories, who file a single tax return every year. This return is processed by Ottawa, and the tax revenue is then distributed to the provinces, based on their individual tax rates.

This issue has been raised in the public arena in the interest of fairness. A number of stakeholders, such as accountants and people who have an interest in tax collection and the effectiveness of this system, started to talk about it to see what could be done to make life easier for Canadians and, in this case, for Quebecers.

I think that, ultimately, every member in this House has good intentions and wants to make life easier for Canadians. Taxpayers in other provinces definitely have it easier when it comes to filing taxes. There are a number of potential solutions for making life easier for taxpayers by allowing them to submit a single tax return.

That is why this idea has stuck around for years through good times and bad, but it was only when the NDP brought it up that it became a hot topic. No offence to the Conservatives and the member

for Louis-Saint-Laurent, who wanted to take all the credit for being the first to raise the issue, but this idea has been around for a long time, and it was the NDP that first proposed exploring it. Initially, the idea was to explore it in Ottawa, and then the NDP adopted a resolution during its February 2018 national convention to make this proposal.

I will now read the resolution adopted in February 2018, well before Quebec's National Assembly voted on the issue on May 15, 2018. A lot happened between February and May. For example, the Conservatives realized they might want to take an interest in this idea. Our resolution read as follows:

WHEREAS having two tax returns in Quebec is costly, inefficient and an exception in Canada; WHEREAS simplifying Quebecers' returns would result in major savings in public funds; WHEREAS having a single tax return would enable taxpayers and businesses in Quebec to save time and money; WHEREAS having a single tax return would enhance Quebec's fiscal autonomy, which is perfectly consistent with the principles set forth in the Sherbrooke declaration...

Let me just note that the Sherbrooke declaration is part of our official policy. Without getting into too much detail, it respects Quebec's autonomy and its decisions. I will continue with the resolution.

...WHEREAS various stakeholders and specialists have worked to bring about this change for many years; WHEREAS the Government of Quebec is already responsible for collecting GST for the federal government...

• (1115)

This is where we get to the heart of the matter, our February 2018 resolution, which reads as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the NDP propose the idea of a single tax return administered by the Government of Quebec, which would subsequently transfer federal tax to the federal government.

Today, I want to focus on the second “be it resolved” statement in the convention resolution, which shows the merits of the work done by members of the NDP before proposing this resolution. It states:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the implementation of this idea must not result in a loss of employment within the federal public service, and therefore this policy proposal must be made in collaboration with the unions and representatives of federal public servants.

The second part of the resolution specifically seeks to ensure that the federal government collaborates with representatives of federal public servants so that this idea is implemented without any jobs being lost in Quebec. The potential loss of jobs in Quebec if this proposal is adopted is something that keeps coming up in today's debate. This condition was put in place by members at the convention. Their intelligence and quick thinking led them to include this condition in the resolution to ensure the maintenance of these high-quality, well-paying jobs, which are an economic driver for the regions.

Business of Supply

The NDP then took steps to find the ideal solution, one that would make life easier for Quebecers while protecting federal public service workers, particularly those working for the Canada Revenue Agency in Quebec's regions. That was when we started a frank and open discussion with union representatives to explore the viability of this idea. During these long discussions, we came to understand that, if this proposal were implemented under the current circumstances, there would be few options for safeguarding jobs in Quebec. There are several reasons for this.

It would not be possible to transfer employees from the Government of Canada to the Government of Quebec. Jobs cannot be transferred to Revenu Québec to handle the resulting workload, because the conditions of employment and benefits are very different. Another solution that was explored was to offer alternative assignments to the affected CRA employees. Again, employees have skills in different areas, whether it be audits, collections or investigations. They do not all have the same skills, and they cannot learn to do another employee's job overnight. They cannot exchange work, because certain skills and requirements are needed for certain positions. It was obvious that this was not a good option.

We therefore realized that, under the current circumstances, it is difficult to support this proposal because we cannot meet the condition of protecting jobs in Quebec.

Today, the Conservatives are raising the same issue in their motion. I have the impression that they are taking up the issue for reasons different from ours, reasons that they have not admitted.

● (1120)

At the end of my speech, I will propose an amendment to the main motion. It will allow us to see the Conservatives' true colours. The amendment seeks to protect the federal public service jobs in Quebec. The Conservatives say that they want to protect jobs. They keep saying that their leader has said as much in various forums, that the jobs will be protected, that the federal public service employees need not worry, that everything will work out and there will be no job losses. We shall see whether the Conservative leader's words translate into action and into protecting the federal public service jobs in the text of the motion. It is all well and good to say that these jobs will be protected, that no one needs to worry, and that all CRA employees will be able to keep their jobs. When it is time to put their money where their mouth is, we will see how they really feel about this issue. We will finally see the Conservatives' true colours.

Although they will not admit it, the real reason the Conservatives proposed this motion is that they want to bring back the austerity of 2011. If that is not true, let them prove it. If they do not support this amendment, then we will see that the real goal of the Conservatives' motion is to bring back the austerity of 2011, when thousands of federal public service jobs were slashed on the pretext of balancing the budget. That is what we are going to see in the 2019 election campaign. They are going to propose an austerity agenda in order to balance the budget by cutting public services and public service jobs. According to current figures, 5,000 federal employees of the Canada Revenue Agency are located in Quebec. That is why the Leader of the Opposition jumped on this proposal. He spotted his chance. Here are 5,000 jobs that can be axed overnight, using Quebec's request for a single tax return as an excuse.

The Conservative leader thought that would be a key piece of his election platform to achieve a balanced budget once he is elected to power. What the Conservatives will not admit, is that the single income tax return has the support of the Conservative leader and Conservative MPs across the country because they see this as an opportunity to introduce a new austerity program. Here is a chance to easily get rid of 5000 jobs that cost hundreds of millions of dollars. That is the real reason why the Conservatives support this motion. We will see what they say later. If they accept my amendment, we will see that they are more concerned about the overall public well-being by making Quebecers' lives easier and protecting good jobs that drive the economy in important regions, including that of my Conservative colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. I think he would be very sad to see the Conservatives vote against an amendment that aims to protect jobs. He must receive a lot of phone calls and emails from his constituents. He will have the opportunity to say it later in his speech. I think that his constituents will be concerned about the motion if we do not include a condition protecting jobs. The Conservatives will have their say, and we will see what they really believe in.

A large number of taxpayers are angry. They are angry because of the way our tax system is managed in general. Taxpayers who pay taxes every year usually tell me that they are angry with the Liberal government's laissez-faire approach toward those who are better off, those who can afford to hire lawyers, tax specialists and accountants specializing in tax avoidance. They are angry, and that is why they insist that the government listen to their demands. These taxpayers do everything they can to pay their taxes when they are due. Sometimes, because of errors made in good faith or because of an omission in a form, they are set upon in record time by the Revenue Agency demanding arrears plus interest. However, they read in the paper that wealthy taxpayers, who do business with companies like KPMG, create tax evasion schemes with the Isle of Man to send their money to another country where income tax rates are low if not non-existent.

● (1125)

A major scheme of this sort was uncovered by the Canada Revenue Agency. These millionaire taxpayers are given amnesty or backroom settlements. A secret deal is made, and everything is settled. They are asked to pay what they have owed for a number of years, then the books are closed, all is forgotten and they go on as if nothing had happened.

The Canada Revenue agency never offers the average taxpayer this sweet deal. The average taxpayer is pursued and hounded by public servants who do what the Canada Revenue Agency asks them to do. It is not their fault, but they do their job and hound taxpayers.

Business of Supply

The Minister of National Revenue goes after people with disabilities who merely want the tax credit for persons with disabilities. She treats them like criminals. Earlier, the minister said that agency employees, victims of Stephen Harper's EI reform, were viewed as criminals.

That is exactly what the Minister of National Revenue is doing to people with disabilities who claim their tax credit. They are seen as criminals who want to take advantage of the system.

Standing here today, I understand why taxpayers are angry and why they are insisting that the government be more attentive to their demands. This motion is an important potential solution. We must consider it and continue to try to find a solution to make Quebecers' lives easier while protecting jobs in Quebec.

That is why we adopted a responsible approach. We did our homework, discussed the issue and spoke with the people involved in order to help simplify the lives of Quebecers filling out their income tax returns.

The Conservatives have not done that. We will see later on where they stand on the issue of protecting jobs.

We assumed our responsibilities and did our homework, unlike the government. Rather than doing its homework, sitting down, reading the documentation and speaking to representatives of Quebec and the union representing employees, it decided to shut the door without discussion, as if making Quebecers' lives easier were unnecessary and not a priority, despite what my constituents in Sherbrooke are telling me. I am certain that, in all of my colleagues' ridings, people are saying that they want to simplify their tax returns.

The government simply refused, as it has in other areas, and slammed the door on Quebec. It said no thanks, it is not interested in Quebec's proposal, since it does not agree with it. End of discussion.

That is a prime example of the government's condescending attitude towards Quebec. It is the same condescending attitude we have seen in several other areas when it comes to respecting Quebec and its autonomy.

That is very different from our respectful approach, which aims to find effective solutions for Canadians who pay their income tax every year and act very responsibly and in good faith—only to be slapped on the wrist at the first opportunity. That is why the underlying principle is good. We want to simplify life for Quebecers and at the same time respect public servants.

Since my speech is coming to a close, I move, seconded by the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, the amendment that will show us what the Conservatives really believe in: I move that the motion be amended by adding the following after the words "May 15, 2018": and must not result in a loss of employment within the federal public service.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska if he consents to this amendment being moved.

• (1130)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, last January 25th, the leader of the NDP clearly stated that he did not support the idea of a single tax return. We are not going to amend our motion just because the NDP has changed its position over the past year. We have made it very clear that there would be no jobs lost.

The motion will remain as is. We invite all parliamentarians who want Quebecers to be able to file a single tax return to support our motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): There is no consent.

Accordingly, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the member for Richmond—Arthabaska just said is absolutely shameful.

He rejected an NDP amendment proposed by my colleague from Sherbrooke. The amendment simply called for ensuring that the jobs would be saved or protected if Quebec moved to a single tax return.

The Conservatives are boasting that the purpose of the motion is to save jobs. However, they were specifically asked, and the member for Richmond—Arthabaska said that this could not be added to the opposition motion being debated today. The message is clear. The Conservatives have absolutely no plan to save the 5,000 good jobs affected by the motion, including about 1,000 jobs in the Saguenay region. A Conservative member from this region could lose his seat in the next election because of this proposal.

The member for Sherbrooke pointed out that the unions have looked at potential solutions to bring the jobs back to Quebec. As members know, about \$230 million in wages could potentially be lost if Quebec took on this responsibility. This has a big impact on jobs and wage losses. The Conservatives should look into this and suggest solutions, if their solutions have been analyzed, which I doubt. They just clearly said that they have no intention of keeping these jobs. Otherwise, they would have voted in favour of our amendment.

Does my colleague from Sherbrooke agree with me on that?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I got the answer to my question.

The answer from the member for Richmond—Arthabaska allowed us to see the Conservatives' true colours. He gave a very convoluted answer to try to explain that his leader has said that he will protect the jobs in question. However, we are seeing the Conservatives' true colours because, after the member concluded his brief remarks, he simply said "no". He showed the Conservatives' true colours on this issue. The Conservatives are refusing to add a simple phrase concerning job protection to the motion.

Business of Supply

The member said that his leader would protect the jobs, so why does including something to that effect in the motion pose a problem? His leader is already saying that that is what he will do. The problem is that the Conservatives do not believe in protecting jobs and they are using this proposal to eliminate jobs in the federal public service. I got the answer to my question. The member rejected a rather simple amendment that would uphold what his leader said. If his leader is prepared to say that he will protect the jobs, then the member should be willing to include something to that effect in the motion. This shows the Conservatives' true colours. Unfortunately, they are using this issue to support their budget-balancing ideology. They see this as an opportunity to cut 5,000 jobs in the federal public service.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister addressed the issues of the importance of jobs in the region. The government is very much aware of this and wants to be sensitive to it. There are wonderful opportunities going forward. I would be interested in my colleague's thoughts on the importance of the national government continuing to have that positive dialogue and maybe looking at ways that it can be enhanced.

My colleague made reference to tax evasion. This government has invested close to a billion dollars to ensure more work is done to go after those who avoid paying taxes. What could the government do that it currently is not doing with respect to this?

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

The answer to his question is simple. Although the Liberals claim they are fighting tax evasion by investing \$1 billion and have a plan that is working, the missing piece of the puzzle is the results.

If my colleague wants a clear answer to his question I would suggest that the government can do more by sending people who commit tax fraud to prison, and the same goes for those who make arrangements offshore to avoid paying their fair share of taxes in Canada. That is what is missing from the current government's track record. There are no convictions or even charges related to offshore tax evasion.

My colleague wants to know what more his government can do. The government can show Canadians that it is serious about fighting tax evasion. It can do so by sending people to jail if they game our system to avoid paying what they rightfully owe for our public services.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his speech, but I would like to request some clarification about the doublespeak we are hearing from the NDP members. Last year, they were right beside us in standing up for Quebecers and supporting the National Assembly's request for a single tax return. All of a sudden, on January 25, their leader, who, as everyone knows, is having a hard time making headway in Quebec right now, decided to oppose this initiative.

I find it hard to understand how the NDP's Quebec members can suddenly change their mind and decide not to respect Quebecers' wishes.

Our resolution is perfectly simple. All it says is that we want to respond to the National Assembly's unanimous request, which reads as follow:

THAT the National Assembly ask the Québec Government and the Federal Government to implement a single tax report for Québec taxpayers, to be filed with Revenu Québec, while preserving Québec's fiscal autonomy.

I will ask the member a simple question, without getting into everything he wants us to believe by fearmongering like the Liberals. To the best of my knowledge, the NDP and the Liberal Party are parties with different policies, and yet, oddly enough, they are becoming aligned. Will he respect the unanimous motion of the National Assembly and vote for the motion we moved today in order to apply pressure to the government so that discussions about a single tax return for Quebecers can begin immediately?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, to give my colleague a simple answer, yes, we are prepared to work on that. It is what we have been doing since we passed a resolution at our February 2018 convention. He may have missed the beginning of my speech, but the key element of that resolution was the second paragraph, which reads:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the implementation of this idea must not result in a loss of employment within the federal public service, and therefore this policy proposal must be made in collaboration with the unions and representatives of federal public servants.

That is the resolution made by our party's members, which we have backed. That is why we support the concept of simplifying Quebecers' lives by allowing them to file a single tax return.

As things stand, that condition cannot be satisfied, but that does not mean we are against the underlying principle. Things need to be done properly, not in some kind of ad hoc way that disregards the workers involved, that does not respect the dignity of those workers, who have been making a big contribution to the economy in communities like Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. That is why we chose a responsible approach. That is my answer to my colleague's question. We did our homework, and that is the conclusion we came to. We are nevertheless open to the idea and to discussion with a view to finding a solution that will make life easier for Quebecers. That is the responsible way to go about this, and it is exactly the opposite of what the Conservatives are doing.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say what a shame it is that a political party with 15 representatives here in the House of Commons would change its mind. That is their right. They have consulted their friends and their union partners. They are free to do that. We all know that any issue that could affect unions or unionization is a total non-starter for the NDP. That is why the NDP decided to change its mind even though Quebec members from all opposition parties in the House of Commons had joined forces to make life easier for Quebecers. The NDP has the right to change its mind, but it has to live with the consequences of doing so.

Business of Supply

•(1140)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry for upsetting my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent. Unfortunately, yes, we in the NDP respect workers. If the Conservatives do not feel the same and do not respect workers and their families, that is their choice. They will see how that works out for them in the affected regions come election day. They might find that people care about their jobs, about providing for their families. The Conservatives are making entire families suffer.

This is another opportunity to remember that today we are seeing the Conservatives' true colours, since they do not care about workers and their well-being. They are doing everything they can to eliminate public servants from the public service of Canada.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

First off I would like to point out to the government that many employees at the Jonquière tax centre fear that their centre will be sacrificed in favour of the one in Shawinigan. Their level of concern following yesterday's announcement of a new, larger, modern building, has increased tenfold.

I would also like to remind my colleagues that, despite the Prime Minister's promise to build a respectful relationship with federal public servants, the fact remains that negotiations for CRA employees' next collective agreement are at a standstill. That is another broken promise, and another mistake made by the Liberal government.

Conservatives keep their promises. That is why, in the first term of a Conservative government, we will introduce a single tax return after negotiating with Quebec, while maintaining employment levels at the Gilles-Marceau building in Jonquière.

I therefore support the motion introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska, which asks the government to work in tandem with the Quebec government to introduce a single tax return.

The Conservative Party is the party that is most attentive to the provinces and regions. We believe in the importance of good, stable jobs and the benefits of decentralizing the economy in favour of the regions.

Come tax time, the Canada Revenue Agency employs almost 1,000 people at the Jonquière tax centre in the riding next to mine. A number of these brave workers live in my riding and studied at Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, also located in my riding.

Yesterday, the members of the Saguenay city council ratified a resolution asking the Premier of Quebec to formally commit to maintaining current employment levels at the Jonquière tax centre should Quebec introduce a single tax return.

Although I appreciate the level of confidence of the members of the Saguenay city council, with a newly elected Conservative government attentive to Quebecers' needs in October 2019, there will still be work to be done.

The motion asks the government to work in tandem with the Quebec government to introduce a single tax return.

The process will have to be negotiated, and will be implemented gradually. The Conservative Party undertakes to harness the expertise of the Canada Revenue Agency and ensure that the transition does not involve any job losses in Quebec's regions.

To be even more clear, the level of employment at the Gilles-Marceau building in Jonquière will be maintained. My leader, a real honest leader who takes his responsibilities, has said so. Public service jobs will not be eliminated. We need public servants to ensure that our federal laws are upheld. We can also make more effective use of the people who work for the federal government. Those who are currently working on processing Quebecers' federal tax returns might work on something else instead.

Employees of the Jonquière tax centre and the Chicoutimi tax service office are skilled and for the most part bilingual.

These employees are also model citizens who are engaged in democracy and involved in the community whether by contributing to the United Way, promoting blood and plasma drives, or making donations to soup kitchens. They work hard and will not be out of work.

However, in light of our deficit situation and our government's reckless spending, we have to be responsible and ensure that none of the work is duplicated.

It is also important to point out that it is hard to find skilled labour. There is a reason the Government of Quebec would like to have the more than 5,000 CRA employees working in Quebec for the province.

•(1145)

However, we believe that the Public Service of Canada will always need its 5,000-plus competent employees who work for the Canada Revenue Agency in Quebec. Those jobs are there to stay.

The Canada Revenue Agency's mission is to administer tax and benefits programs, and to ensure compliance on behalf of governments across Canada, thereby contributing to the ongoing economic and social well-being of Canadians. It has a very broad and important mission.

Right now there are workload duplications because of the two tax returns, but there will be no shortage of work with a single tax return.

All Canadians will benefit from this new efficiency on the part of the CRA, because the agency ensures compliance across Canada and administers benefit programs, such as the Canada child benefit and the disability tax credit.

The government will be able to allocate more resources without increasing its spending in order to simplify life for all Canadians, improve the CRA's services and fight tax evasion.

These new financial resources, obtained without any increase in government spending, will open up new opportunities for the CRA and will result in better jobs in terms of employment stability and wage security.

Business of Supply

Of course, this will not reduce the cost of the accounting software or the accountant's services. However, this measure will make life easier for Quebecers.

Who can explain why the income reported in box A of my RL-1 slip is not the same as that reported in box 4 of my T4? Why are business-use-of-home expenses not calculated in the same way for the Quebec return and the federal return?

Unlike the Liberals, who will have to increase Quebecers' and Canadians' taxes to manage their spending spree, the Conservatives are looking for solutions so they can do more without increasing government spending and reduce the tax burden on families.

Quebec families would save hundreds of dollars if the Government of Quebec would adopt the federal government's definition of income and stop collecting tax on the taxable benefit consisting of the employer's contribution to health and dental insurance.

We want to make life easier for Canadians and Quebecers. We want to responsibly manage government spending. We want to reduce the tax burden on Quebec families. A Conservative government would sit down with the province's representatives and have a constructive discussion to make this request a reality.

The Conservatives respect provincial jurisdictions and have full confidence in provincial institutions. There is already an agreement with the province concerning the administration of the GST.

Quebec is the only province in Canada where people have to fill out two tax returns. That is a major irritant for Quebecers and we, the Conservatives, are the only ones showing any leadership on this issue. We want to correct this situation.

The Liberal government and the NDP are being irresponsible by wrongly raising the spectre of job losses. As I said throughout my speech, they should instead be focusing on listening to the provinces, simplifying life for Quebecers, improving the Canada Revenue Agency's services, fighting tax evasion, and maintaining stable, good-quality jobs at the Jonquière and Shawinigan tax centres.

In closing, I would like to remind members that the principle underlying the Canadian Confederation is that of a contract between the provinces for the management of common interests. It is founded on the power of the provinces.

The Conservatives have always understood that principle. They will continue to decentralize and to listen to the provinces, particularly Quebec. We learned through our "Listening to Quebecers" tour that a single tax return is a priority. A Conservative government would begin negotiations with the Government of Quebec and make that a reality.

• (1150)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just came from Shawinigan, where we announced the construction of a new building. We made this announcement because we support the CRA employees who work in the regions of Quebec.

However, even though jobs in Jonquière and Chicoutimi are on the line, the member will not stand up to his leader and to his entire party, which has decided to wipe out all CRA positions in the regions of Quebec, including those in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie and the Outaouais.

Can the member explain himself? What, exactly, is his job if not to protect jobs in Chicoutimi?

Mr. Richard Martel: My colleague is trying to get into the details instead of debating the principle.

The Liberals know full well that the details will be resolved after several hours of negotiation with the provincial government. They should listen to Quebecers, like our leader, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, has done in recent months. The member would have learned that having to file two returns is a major irritant.

We need to find constructive solutions, and our proposal to move to a single tax return is a constructive one. The problem with the Liberals is that they centralize powers in Ottawa instead of better serving the interests of ordinary Canadians.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his remarks. He obviously cares about this issue.

However, he will have to explain to his constituents in Chicoutimi—Le Fjord why his colleague, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska and the sponsor of the motion, opposed an amendment that sought specifically to protect jobs, when he had spent most of his own speech talking about defending them. Furthermore, the member's speech was not well thought out, since he proposed solutions that made no sense to the people involved. I therefore have a very simple question for the member.

Why did the Conservatives refuse to include any mention of protecting jobs in their motion? If they truly believed in it, they would do more than talk about it. They would include it in their motion.

Why did they refuse such a simple motion that sought to do exactly what the member said repeatedly during his speech, but that the Conservatives refuse to put in writing?

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Speaker, we believe in our leader and our party, and we will keep our word.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this issue of protecting jobs is essential. It is important to us in the Bloc Québécois as well. We believe that the government would have to negotiate with the Government of Quebec and the unions to ensure that these workers are properly protected. That goes without saying. I do not think that a debate on this in the House is necessary. I hope that we do not need a debate to tell government members how they should act on these issues.

However, the purpose of the House is to serve the people, and the people of Quebec are tired of having to file two tax returns. They are asking for the single tax return. This is a long-standing request. Minister Séguin asked for this back in 2004, and it has always been recognized that the jurisdiction best prepared to manage the issue of tax returns is the Government of Quebec.

Business of Supply

Today, our colleagues in the Conservative Party have joined us in making this request. I thank them for that. However, we have to wonder why, since they were in power for 10 years, after all, and could have taken action on this back then. At least they are taking action this year. We cannot fault them for doing so, and we are very happy about it.

That said, there needs to be some movement. We are here to serve the people. The people need this government to step up and take responsibility, without putting the blame on collective agreements. It makes no sense. It is disgraceful and unworthy of a Parliament.

● (1155)

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague.

In this matter, it is essential to listen to Quebec. Let us not forget that both times that Quebec wanted to separate from Canada, the federal Liberals were in government. In the Conservative Party, we always respect provincial jurisdiction. That is the way we operate.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to take part in the debate on the motion moved by my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska on a request that is very important to my constituents in Lévis—Lotbinière and to all Quebecers.

This motion addresses a clear and legitimate request from Quebecers and the National Assembly, namely to cut the paperwork burden on Quebecers significantly by allowing them to file a single tax return. Currently, all Quebecers are required to file two tax returns as soon as they start earning an income, even if they have not reached the age of majority.

This noble and legitimate request for a single tax return will save time and money for Quebec families and all Quebecers. Let us be clear: Quebec is the only province in Canada that still has to take on this onerous task. The Liberal government does not seem moved by this fact by one iota, because saving time and money is simply not part of its values.

I have a real-life example. Not so long ago, all our children were still living under our roof. That meant 14 personal tax returns for a single household, in addition to the two returns I had to file for my small farming business. Think about it. That adds up to 16 tax returns for one humble abode. Families, students and young workers are being asked to do repetitive, counterproductive work when they just want to be active on the labour market.

We Conservatives are loyal to our values, and we care about making Quebecers' lives easier and saving them time and money. By contrast, the Liberals keep raising taxes more and more to feed their insatiable appetite for spending money here, there and everywhere, all over the planet, in the hope of burnishing their image at our expense.

We, the Conservatives, are capable of building bridges and ships and making sure that Quebecers only have to file one tax return. It takes leadership and political willpower to change people's lives in a lasting and positive way.

The Liberals are so eager to do whatever it takes to help their buddies get rich that they managed to legalize marijuana, but when it

comes to doing something that would help all Quebecers, they are totally against favouritism and preferential treatment. Their adamant refusal is baffling.

The Minister of National Revenue comes back to us in the House with simplistic arguments, such as the fear of massive job losses, but all those claims are unfounded. There is no evidence that this would change anything for the millions of students working across Quebec.

A Liberal government that starts dancing just in time to get noticed simply does not deserve to be in power.

With all due respect to the role of minister, I cannot help but think that the Minister of National Revenue's only role is to serve as the spokesperson for a centralizing government that turns a deaf ear to Quebecers' legitimate demands.

Fortunately, on October 21, 2019, Quebecers will be able to decide who is more likely to listen to their wishes, the Liberals or the Conservatives, and who will be more likely to work for a more productive Quebec, a stronger Quebec, a richer Quebec, a Quebec that is a partner in Canada's success, a Quebec that is proud of its culture and heritage, a Quebec that is worthy of the French language, a Quebec that is respected by the Conservative Party of Canada for what it has achieved, a proud partner in the success of all Canadians from all provinces.

As my mother always said, beauty does not put bread on the table. October 21 will see the end of the Liberal government and its princely and spendthrift Prime Minister, who does not respect provincial jurisdiction or, by extension, Canadians, and who refuses to accept perfectly reasonable requests like having a single tax return.

Historically, the Conservatives have said yes to Quebec's requests. We said yes to the construction of the new Champlain Bridge, yes to the future third link in Quebec City, yes to the *Asterix* and *Obelix* ships for Davie, yes to more power over immigration for Quebec, yes to a single tax return.

● (1200)

That is open federalism. That is a government working for the people. Imagine what life and the future will be like for Canadians with this collaborative federalism supporting concrete, positive actions for the benefit of all Canadians.

The Conservative Party proved it once and is prepared to prove it again, since we have always said what we would do and done what we said we would. We have always kept our promises, even at the risk of losing Liberal support.

Our first concrete action will not be to imitate the grasshopper from the fable or to take selfies, but to deliver a single tax return for all Quebecers.

Business of Supply

Canadians' future is their own, and it will soon be time to decide. This will be a historic turning point for Canadians, and I can assure you that the voters of Lévis—Lotbinière understand that a vote for any party other than the Conservatives would only result in the re-election of a princely, extravagant and arrogant Prime Minister. Canadians will soon have real hope of seeing a healthy, competent administration make sound choices for future generations. Canadians deserve only the best, and they deserve an efficient administration to lead our country.

I believe that representing Canadians in the House of Commons is an immense privilege, an honour and a serious responsibility. It is high time that our Prime Minister reflected these values, which only the Conservative Party of Canada can translate into concrete action.

It cannot be denied that the Liberals are doing everything they can to hinder the sound, fair and equitable representation of Quebeckers and all other Canadians. They have taken over a bureaucracy that jealously guards its budgets so they can use it for their own partisan interests. That is unacceptable and unjustifiable. I would ask my esteemed Liberal colleagues to open their eyes and, above all, not to forget why they are here: to serve Canadians fairly and honourably. Following the lead of a Prime Minister who thinks nothing of spending taxpayers' money freely is no longer a viable option, since we are already feeling the consequences.

In conclusion, my message to the people of Lévis—Lotbinière is that they should consider an easier day-to-day life, consider our children, consider tomorrow, and consider the Conservative Party, which can deliver a bridge, a ship and a single tax return.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I just got back from Shawinigan, where we were proud to announce the construction of a new building to accommodate the growing number of Canada Revenue Agency employees in Mauricie. Those new jobs are in addition to others that are being created in Jonquière, Chicoutimi, Gatineau and all over Quebec. I was also in Matane a week ago to see our offices there, which are providing more and more services to the whole of government.

The member for Lévis—Lotbinière is proud that the Bloc Québécois supports his proposal. I think the top priority must be to protect jobs in Quebec, especially in the regions. The member needs to make things somewhat clearer for us than his colleague from Chicoutimi did and tell us why he did not stand up to his leader in defence of jobs in the regions all over Quebec. Why is the member not standing up for jobs in Quebec?

• (1205)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I would like him to stop fearmongering. Yes, Quebeckers working for the Canada Revenue Agency are doing outstanding auditing work, and that work will not stop. The Liberals are exaggerating. We think Quebeckers should be able to submit a single tax return, and there is no reason to believe that would cause job losses. Quebeckers want to waste less time, do less paperwork and have more money in their pockets, and that is what we are going to deliver for them within our first 100 days.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I realize that we were the first to raise the idea of examining the possibility of a single tax return for Quebeckers. It was adopted as a resolution at our federal convention, but it stipulated that the single tax return must not result in any job losses for the people of Mauricie or Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean in the interest of keeping good jobs in the regions.

The Conservatives are saying that it is no big deal, since we are voting only on the principle today and we should believe their assurances that they want to achieve this without any job losses. We tested them by suggesting an amendment to their motion, adding in writing that no jobs would be lost in the federal public service. Can my friend from the Conservative Party explain to me why he rejected the NDP's amendment?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am pleased to be able to have this debate with my NDP colleague regarding the possibility of Quebeckers filing a single tax return.

Everyone here has the same rights. We can all talk about our concerns and our desire to protect jobs, which is worth mentioning. What matters, however, is that at the end of the debate, and ultimately, in two or three years, or perhaps after the October 21 election, Quebeckers will fortunately be able to file a single tax return. That is the ultimate goal.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I believe that just about everyone agrees that having a single tax return makes the most sense and would save time and money.

We know that individuals spend \$300 million and businesses spend \$400 million every year to prepare their tax returns. I do not understand the Liberal's very weak argument. It is as though they are telling us that even though having a single tax return would save money, it would result in job losses. Could these people not be used to fight tax evasion or improve the efficiency of the Phoenix pay system? I think these public servants would be very happy with that.

Then we have our Conservative friends who, with an election looming and even though they have not taken action on this issue, are suddenly presenting this request. We agree that it is a good thing.

However, we do not agree with their assertion that the Conservative government respects provincial jurisdictions. We have seen their response concerning Quebec: they refuse to reconsider multiculturalism, and they support institutional bilingualism and kick-starting energy east.

The NDP says that it is not necessarily against the principle, but they will not support it in order to save jobs. I believe it would be more logical to support the principle—

The Deputy Speaker: We only have time for the answer.

The hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is very broad. I can tell him that the Conservative Party is the only party in the House that will be able to fulfill the election promise of bringing in a single tax return to improve the everyday lives of Quebeckers.

Business of Supply

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my esteemed colleague from Gatineau. Before I get to my speech, there are a few things that I heard here in the House that I cannot help but comment on.

When the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord was asked what would happen to the 5,500 Canada Revenue Agency jobs at risk in the regions of Quebec, he told us that this is a detail to be ironed out. The 5,500 families who depend on these jobs do not see this as merely a detail. When asked how the Conservatives would solve this problem, he said that he believes in his leader. Quebecers are not fooled. They know very well that before the election, the Conservatives try to sweet-talk Quebecers. They smile broadly and try to sell them on the concept of open federalism.

We heard the member for Lévis—Lotbinière talking about the Conservatives' yeses in Quebec and giving a list of promises for the future. However, historically, the Conservatives said no to appointing bilingual judges to the Supreme Court. The Conservative government appointed two unilingual anglophone judges to the Supreme Court of Canada despite the opinions of the National Assembly, the entire legal profession, and Quebecers. They appointed unilingual anglophone officers of Parliament. In Quebec, they destroyed the data from the firearms registry, while the National Assembly and the entire political class in Quebec wanted to keep it. That was the open federalism of Stephen Harper's government that they are so proud of. Quebecers are not fooled, and they have a long memory. They will not soon forget it.

In short, unlike what the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and the bunch opposite are saying, 5,500 jobs are not mere details.

I will now get to my speech on the motion before us today. This may sound attractive, but the issue is much more complex than my colleagues on the other side of the House think. I wish to begin by enlightening them on a few aspects of their motion.

The Canada Revenue Agency is our national tax administrator and has developed a great deal of expertise in harmonizing the federal tax rules with the various provincial and territorial ones. The CRA has signed a number of ever-evolving collection agreements across the country, so it understands best what kind of flexibility is needed when considering the social and economic policy objectives of each province or territory.

So far, the federal government, nine provinces and three territories have harmonized their definitions of income and have a single tax return for individuals, which is administered by the federal government. Quebec has different definitions, different rules and different exemptions. For Quebec to have a single tax return and for these taxes to be administered effectively, harmonization would be required. However, the Conservatives are not saying how this would happen. They are saying that, just like with the jobs, these details can be sorted out later, and that they believe in their leader. They cannot tell us how this harmonization would work. Would Quebec harmonize with the rest of the country, or vice versa? This was my first point.

Second, since it administers harmonized regimes, and like any good administrator, the CRA was able to achieve economies of scale.

In fact, administrative costs for managing the provincial and territorial programs are covered by the federal government when the programs are identical.

We can agree that administering two programs that are not harmonized costs money. That is the rub. Harmonizing two programs comes at a cost. The Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec agree on that. However, if the Premier of Quebec asks for a refund for the administrative costs borne by Quebec for administering the federal program, as he said he would, that is where the two governments no longer agree. Why pay that kind of money?

The CRA is more than qualified to administer its federal tax program. We can see why the Government of Canada thinks that this type of scenario would not be beneficial to Canadians or Quebecers.

Third, my colleagues across the way seem to be unaware of the CRA's considerable expertise internationally, even though they formed the government for 10 years. The Canada Revenue Agency is a world-class tax administrator and represents Canada among many international partners. This expertise is put to use for fighting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance.

Over the past three years, our government has invested over \$1 billion in the fight against tax evasion. Clearly, the Stephen Harper government, which the Conservatives are so proud of, never made fighting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance a priority. In fact, the revenue minister of the day, Mr. Blackburn, even told the *Journal de Montréal* last summer in a burst of candour and honesty that, under Mr. Harper, the fight against tax evasion was never a priority and they did not even talk about it. It was not important to them. Obviously, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

● (1210)

On the contrary, the government is determined to ensure that all individuals and all businesses pay their fair share of taxes. We are determined to make it much harder for those who choose to avoid paying their taxes.

Because of the over \$1 billion in investments that we made in the past three budgets, the CRA now has the tools and means to work and exchange financial information with tax authorities around the world.

We also greatly surpassed our goal to recover \$319.5 million in additional tax revenues in 2017-18 by recovering \$500 million in additional taxes. We made investments in the CRA to hire over 1,300 more auditors, enhance infrastructure development, improve the risk assessment system, and strengthen its capacity to target cases of tax evasion for investigation and criminal prosecution purposes.

Business of Supply

As soon as the investments were announced in 2016, my colleague, the Minister of National Revenue, announced the creation of an independent advisory committee on offshore tax evasion and aggressive tax planning. Thanks to those investments, the CRA now has better data and better approaches for combatting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, and it is achieving better results.

Canadians and Quebecers can be proud that this country now has one of the largest tax treaty networks in the world, with 93 tax treaties and 24 tax information exchange agreements with other nations around the globe.

The CRA also plays a leading role as a member of the Joint International Tax Shelter Information Centre, a network of close to 40 countries, in which Canada works closely with other tax administrations to coordinate tax compliance activities across the spectrum of international tax risks.

Our collaboration with our international partners is vital for successfully fighting tax evasion. However, only Canada can ratify international agreements. As a signatory to international tax treaties and tax information exchange agreements with other countries, Canada has a key role to play. Like the other provinces and territories, Quebec does not have the same legal means as Canada does to recover money it is owed that is held in other territories.

That means that if a taxpayer decides to transfer their assets to another province or country, Quebec would have neither the legal standing nor the extraterritorial jurisdiction to follow those assets outside Quebec's territory. However, as I mentioned, Canada does have that authority.

For all of these reasons, I invite my colleagues opposite to follow the NDP's lead and reconsider their position on this matter.

•(1215)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, although he was using all sorts of diversions throughout much of it.

[*English*]

There were many red herrings in that speech.

When it comes to the question of the government's inability to understand what to do with the public service workers now filling out this redundant second filing of income taxes in Quebec, I wonder why one would not simply reassign those jobs. This could be done most productively, perhaps, in the pursuit of offshore Canadian tax evaders. It could be done long distance, done at a computer. That is what the minister's staff on that assignment are doing now. Why not do this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to finally see a Conservative member take an interest in cracking down on fiscal evasion and propose to redeploy resources to that end.

That is precisely what we have done in our past three budgets. We hired more than 1,300 auditors to go after those who try to dodge their tax obligations in Canada and who resort to excessive tax avoidance.

However, for 10 years, while the member was here in this House as part of the Harper government, he and his colleagues did not care one iota about combatting tax avoidance. As I mentioned during my speech, former minister Blackburn said that they did not really talk about it and that it was not a priority for the Harper government.

Maybe something positive will come out of this debate: finally, a Conservative member woke up and said that we need to crack down on tax avoidance. It is too little, too late, unfortunately.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I agree with him on certain points.

Since we are talking about Revenue Canada, I am also interested in tax avoidance. I cannot understand how the Liberal government could sign new tax treaties with tax havens. It is making the problem worse.

A few years ago, the Conference Board—not exactly a bunch of leftists—reported that the federal government lost between \$9 billion and \$49 billion a year because of millionaires and billionaires hiding their money offshore to avoid paying their fair share of taxes here at home. The rest of us are paying for that.

I would like to know the number of millionaires and white-collar fraudsters the Liberal government managed to put behind bars. Last time I checked, it was zero.

•(1220)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, information exchange agreements provide useful and necessary information to the CRA, allowing it to identify taxpayers who engage in tax evasion or aggressive tax avoidance. That is precisely why such agreements exist with different foreign entities. Prosecuting tax evaders is much more complex than it seems. We need all this information and international co-operation to succeed.

The fact is, since we came into power, we have invested \$1 billion in the CRA to ensure it has the necessary resources to catch those who engage in aggressive tax avoidance. That is an ambitious goal, an ambition that was sorely lacking for a decade under Stephen Harper. I encourage my colleague to read an interesting article published recently in *La Presse* about the CRA. It explains how the CRA is able to hire more auditors and catch more fraudsters thanks to these investments.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual, my colleague from Louis-Hébert gave an intelligent and eloquent speech.

In the speeches from the other side of the House, they claim to have Quebec's interests at heart, but they contradict each other. They forget to mention why there are two tax forms in Quebec. It is not to annoy Quebecers: it is because Quebec wanted to have a mechanism to pursue special economic and social objectives.

Why does the Conservative Party want to take away this flexibility in Quebec?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind words and his question.

Business of Supply

On this subject, it should be pointed out that our government is always willing to work with our provincial partners, particularly Quebec. We need to come up with ways to make life easier for Quebecers and Canadians and to work together better in order to be as effective as possible.

It is really difficult to take everything coming from the other side of the House seriously. For 10 years, Prime Minister Harper, who they keep praising in the House—and I would like Quebecers to hear this—refused to even meet his provincial counterparts. He did not even attend the Council of the Federation.

We have no lessons to learn from this so-called open federalism, which they trampled on for 10 years.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure for me to speak. I have been waiting a long time for the opportunity to take part in a debate that not only concerns a very important issue for Canada, but is also central to our respective visions of the role of government. I am referring here to the role of the Government of Canada, and to the role of government in the daily lives of Quebecers and Canadians.

I want to talk about this party's total disregard for our public servants and the modern machinery of government, but first I will talk about the issue at hand, which is tax collection. Obviously, the average Quebecer would like to have to file only one tax return, just like everyone else in the rest of the country, in the nine other provinces and three other territories. There people only have to file one return. However, the Robillard Commission, which was set up by the Government of Quebec not so long ago, pointed out that Quebec taxpayers could save about \$400 million by harmonizing with Revenue Canada, which currently enjoys economies of scale across the country.

The Government of Quebec could give \$400 million back to its taxpayers while maintaining the social and economic objectives mentioned by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis. It would mean keeping an eye on these objectives, while at the same time saving Quebec taxpayers money. This deserves our attention.

We say yes to co-operation and to making life easier for all taxpayers in Quebec and Canada. I note that 85% of taxpayers, when they file their returns, do so electronically. They press a button, and their federal return is sent to Revenue Canada, their provincial return is sent to Revenu Québec, and that is it. That is our perspective on this issue.

I want to talk about the contempt that is expressed every day on the other side of the House for the state, for the Government of Canada. Since this is an election year, I think it is important that all Government of Canada employees, particularly those in the National Capital Region, hear what the Conservative Party is really saying.

• (1225)

[English]

My colleagues from the national capital region will be running in an election this year. They will be running against Conservative opponents who are going to promise unicorns and rainbows, but here is what the record says.

What did the Conservative Party leave us? They left us crumbling infrastructure. They left us office buildings with bricks falling off them so that we have to put netting on them. Why? It is because they would not invest, they said, in federal infrastructure, in offices for bureaucrats.

Here is what else the Conservatives left us: The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, their esteemed colleague, left that dreary DRAP program, which yielded what?

Let us talk about job losses. Let us talk about the Phoenix pay system. Let us talk about the order given by Stephen Harper to summarily fire 700 public servants.

[Translation]

They laid off the 700 most experienced compensation specialists without notice and left us with a computer system that could not pay civil servants.

It is not a problem for the Conservatives, since reducing the deficit is the only thing that matters to them.

What about the Government of Canada jobs not only in the national capital region, but across the country and Quebec? Today, we are talking about the 5,500 families that have one member working for the Canada Revenue Agency. I have met people who work for the CRA and for all Canadians in the regions of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie and Matane, and at the Promenades de l'Outaouais mall in Gatineau. Quebecers here in Gatineau or Ottawa and in the various regions of Quebec are proud to contribute to shaping this magnificent country. They are proud to do their part to help make Canada the best country in the world.

The cynics across the aisle are telling us that a single tax return is what matters, not jobs in the regions. I was surprised to hear my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord say that.

I asked him what he would do to protect his constituents. First, he said that he believes in his leader, a guy from Regina. Then he told me that the thousands of jobs are just a detail. These jobs are not a detail at all. Yesterday, I met with the president of the Union of Taxation Employees. He does not see these jobs as a detail. He does not see working conditions in Chicoutimi as a detail. The people of Chicoutimi certainly do not see the future of their jobs and the well-being of their families as a detail either.

The members opposite feel contempt for civil servants. They despise the Government of Canada's bureaucracy, infrastructure, employees and computer systems, which are all details for those who belong to the Conservative Party. Earlier, they were patting themselves on the back for having the support of the Bloc Québécois. A proud party, whose leader at the time was among the founding fathers of Canada, is delighted to get the formal support of the Bloc Québécois in the House. I cannot believe my ears.

Business of Supply

•(1230)

[*English*]

Not only people in Ottawa and Gatineau but all employees of the Government of Canada need to understand and listen very carefully to what these people talk about when they talk about government programs and the people who deliver them and the ways that we do that work.

In the next election the Conservatives are going to be talking a lot about these things and will never say what their agenda is, but that is what we will be talking about, because we have starkly different visions about the role of the Government of Canada.

We believe that the Government of Canada and the people who serve it are there to serve people, to make people's lives better—and yes, to catch tax cheats all over the world, and yes, to make sure people get across borders safely, and yes, every day to build that infrastructure and those things that help make Canada the number one country in which to live.

The people who serve the Government of Canada in this Chamber will always have our support.

[*Translation*]

People in the regions of Quebec deserve as much support as people here in the capital, especially from their MPs.

That is why I, like all my colleagues, will tirelessly travel around Quebec and across the country to talk with people, reassure them, and provide them with the tools and infrastructure they need to do the work they are very proud of, namely to serve all Canadians, help us build this country, and make Canada a fairer, more prosperous place. That is the issue at the heart of today's debate.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for Canadians, this is not the first time that members of the Liberal Party have used scare tactics to frighten people by saying that there would be job losses, that this would be the end of the world and that it would be terrible.

We do not need to go back decades. Just a few months ago, in May and June, there was an election in the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. Week after week, prominent Liberals came forward to say that the Conservatives were in favour of a single tax return and that this would result in job losses. The people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord spoke. While we finished fourth three years ago, 53% of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord voted for the Conservatives this time.

Enough with Liberal fearmongering. In fact, I must point out to my Liberal colleague that Quebec's former finance minister just responded by saying that he found this unfortunate. He said that he was extremely disappointed because this was something in the public interest of Quebecers, and that what he really wants is for the two agencies to continue working together. This is a provincial Liberal whose party balanced the budget, unlike the federal Liberal Party.

My question to the member is, why does he want to scare Canadians when they are not fooled by this fearmongering?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I need only repeat what my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord said in answer to my question.

Why did he not stand up to his leader about these jobs that would disappear? Why did he not stand up for his thousands of fellow Quebecers and their families who depend on these jobs, which they do so well? What did that member say? He said it was a detail and that he believed in his leader.

Whoever claims to be speaking on behalf of the regions of Quebec in this debate absolutely must explain what will happen to each and every job if the worst happens, that is, if this party is elected and carries out its plan.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his contribution to the debate.

His speech proved that on this subject, only one party is serious, responsible and ready to tackle this issue, to discuss it and to try to find a solution to make things easier for Canadians. On the one side, we have the Conservatives, who would do anything to get rid of 5,000 public service jobs for the sake of their balanced budget ideology. They would jump at an opportunity like this to balance the budget, even if it meant sacrificing families and entire regions whose economies depend on these jobs.

On the other side, we have the Liberals, who are stonewalling. They would not even consider discussing an important issue that would make life easier for Canadians.

Why did my colleague, as a government member and as parliamentary secretary, not do the responsible thing, which is to sit down and try to find a solution to make life easier for Canadians, especially Quebecers, instead of shooting the idea down completely?

•(1235)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The reason we invested \$1 billion in CRA systems and a new call centre is to improve service to the public, to fight tax evasion more effectively and to align our practices with those of our partners, like Revenu Québec.

Our government has proven itself. In fact, just yesterday, we officially announced to the people of the Mauricie region that the future of their tax centre is assured and that a new building will be built to accommodate more public servants.

We are investing and improving services for Canadians, and we will continue to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is shameful that the parliamentary secretary is using our public service employees as political pawns, fearmongering them into thinking their jobs are at stake. What is at stake is the opportunity for Quebecers' lives to be made more simple, to make things easier. I am wondering what the parliamentary secretary has against Quebecers, or is this just another Justin Trudeau mistake?

The Deputy Speaker: I call on the hon. member to use either the titles or the riding names of hon. members in his next interventions.

Business of Supply

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. member to the beautiful riding of Gatineau, Quebec, where he can explain to public servants the record of his party. He can explain that dreary DRAP program and the Phoenix pay system it left behind to the Quebeckers who work for the Government of Canada. He can explain to them that he believes that standing up in the chamber and defending the role of the Government of Canada and the work of federal public servants is somehow using them as pawns. He is the one using them as pawns. He is the one showing a total classless lack of respect for the employees of the Government of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

What I am hearing from the members across the way is unbelievable. The Liberals are out of touch with reality, and they are not working for Quebec. It saddens me.

I would like to remind the House that our political lieutenant for Quebec tabled a motion this morning. I am very proud that the member for Richmond—Arthabaska tabled a motion that is in the interest of Canadians, especially Quebeckers.

We are here to stand up for Quebeckers. We are the Quebec caucus within the national caucus of the Conservative Party of Canada, and our colleagues listen to us very carefully. However, that does not seem to be the case across the aisle. As Conservatives, we work together in the interest of all Canadians, but today in particular, we need to think about the interests of Quebeckers and the single tax return.

I would like to remind the people listening to us at home what topic we have been discussing this morning in the House. As I was saying, my colleague tabled the following motion this morning:

That, given:

(a) the House has great respect for provincial jurisdiction and trust in provincial institutions;

(b) the people of Quebec are burdened with completing and submitting two tax returns, one federal and one provincial; and

(c) the House believes in cutting red tape and reducing unnecessary paperwork to improve the everyday lives of families; therefore,

the House call on the government to work with the Government of Quebec to implement a single tax return in Quebec, as adopted unanimously in the motion of the National Assembly of Quebec on May 15, 2018.

In my view, letting people file a single tax return is the least we could do. I do not understand why the Liberal government are so stubbornly opposed to the idea. Quebeckers are the only people in Canada that have to do twice the work in February, March or April when they file their tax return. I do not understand the motives behind the Liberal government's decision to say no to Quebec, no to Quebeckers and no to a single tax return. That is unacceptable.

What is the basis of that refusal? The Liberals justify it by saying that they want to protect 5,500 jobs in Quebec, meaning the jobs of Canadian public servants working for the Canada Revenue Agency.

Before being elected to the House, I was an entrepreneur. If entrepreneurs in Canada and Quebec acted this way, it would be irresponsible for the future of their companies.

It is 2019, and the technology exists. Can we at least consider the possibility of finding a solution so Quebeckers have less paperwork to fill out? The Liberal government's position is a categorical no. Why is this centralizing government saying no to Quebec? To protect jobs.

The leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, the leader of the official opposition in the House of Commons, has very clearly said that no jobs would be lost. It must be said that we have a better record of keeping our word than the Liberals do. When the Liberals say things and make promises, we have our doubts, because they have a long list of broken promises.

However, when our party, the Conservative Party of Canada, formed the government, we kept our promises, whereas the current government has caused a mess over the last three years. Our "score" is almost 100%, which is excellent.

What is important to understand is that we must undertake a reflection. Personally, I think that the 40 Liberal members from Quebec, and I am not talking about Ali Baba and his 40 thieves, should be realistic and fair. They should have the trust and willpower to get things done. They should respect Quebeckers.

• (1240)

It is acceptable for the GST. Revenu Québec can collect the GST and remit it to Ottawa, but maybe the Liberals see Quebeckers as second-class citizens when it comes to filing tax returns. The Liberals have not even considered the possibility of finding a solution and studying the feasibility of a single tax return. Is that trust? I do not think so.

We need to be realistic. As I mentioned earlier, there is reality. It is 2019, and the technology exists. We can reduce the paperwork today. It is a matter of putting numbers in columns, but the exercise must be multiplied by two and by the number of residents of Quebec. How many additional returns is that?

Where there is a will to make things better, there is a way. Where there is no will, excuses will certainly be found. Scare tactics will be used. We need to be realistic. Being realistic means looking at the system that exists now and considering the feasibility of the issue. However, the Liberals' answer is a categorical no, and they refuse to commit.

Why ask twice the effort from Quebeckers in the name of fairness? Quebec is the only province to complete two income tax returns. To be fair, will the Liberal government announce a tax credit in its next budget for Quebeckers who are required to pay an accountant twice as much because they file two tax returns? Maybe we will have a surprise in March when the Minister of Finance tables his budget. If we follow the government's reasoning regarding fairness, there should be compensation for Quebeckers.

Business of Supply

What is lacking is political will. The minister is hiding behind the argument of lost jobs. I repeat, as our leader mentioned, that no jobs will be lost. I asked the Prime Minister a question last week. We were discussing the income tax return and the reason why he was saying no to Quebecers. I will read his answer to my question in the House. I do not know what planet he was on, but he replied, “Mr. Speaker, how interesting. The Conservatives are saying one thing in French and another in English.”

I do not know if he was talking about the Liberals. We Conservatives are saying only one thing.

• (1245)

[English]

I can speak English and French.

[Translation]

We will work for Quebec and to meet the needs of Quebecers. Quebec has a labour shortage. More than 1,000 positions are vacant according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We will continue to work with Quebec on its files.

Here in the House last Wednesday, the Prime Minister himself said that there was a labour shortage. The Minister of National Revenue says she wants no lost jobs. I have quite a few ideas for her to consider. Take employees and send them to work on tax evasion. For three years, the Liberals have invested millions of dollars without any results.

Why not use that expertise? Public servants are skilled workers. We will respect Canadian public servants, and we will ensure that they are paid, which is very important. At the very least, public servants need to be paid by the government for the services they provide.

I am getting carried away. I should return to my notes. Speaking of the Minister of National Revenue, a few months ago, she developed a new slogan, “the net is tightening”. Last week it became, “Chop, chop, chop”. This is not the theatre; this is the House of Commons. This is serious. Quebecers deserve our respect. This is unacceptable behaviour on the part of a minister. It is as if she were on a stage. She is putting on a play. It is unacceptable as well as irresponsible.

I do not understand how this Liberal government can say no to Quebecers and no to a single income tax return.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Speaking of theatre, Mr. Speaker, I think what we have just witnessed is an excellent example of play-acting. It even ends up being believable. However, the ones who do not believe it are Quebecers, because they saw the Conservatives play that movie so often. They come to Quebec all smiles to show openness just before an election, but after the elections, they only say no to Quebec.

Let us not forget when two unilingual anglophone judges were appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada by Stephen Harper, whom my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier admires so much. Let us not forget the appointment of unilingual anglophone officers of Parliament and the destruction of data from the gun registry. Let us also not forget how my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière and the whole bunch from Quebec were decked out in

their stylish Nordiques jerseys just before the federal government decided not to fund the Quebec amphitheatre at the time.

Now, we hear them say that they will protect these 5,500 jobs and that these are just details to be sorted out at a later date. However, they are not details for the 5,500 families who depend on these jobs.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, it is quite impressive to hear my colleague from Louis-Hébert say that the Conservatives are not to be believed.

As for the amphitheatre, it was Mr. Harper who said no. He stood firm in the interest of protecting taxpayer dollars. There was a principle and guidelines and he followed those rules. Unfortunately for Quebecers, there was no investment, but Mr. Harper was fair, just, honest and loyal.

How can this member stand and tell us that we do not keep our word? What has he done since June 30, 2016, when he asked voters in Louis-Hébert to vote for him by promising to have the Quebec Bridge painted? It is 2019 and the Quebec Bridge has yet to see a drop of paint, so he cannot lecture anyone.

• (1250)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if there is anyone who cannot lecture anyone about painting the Quebec Bridge, it is certainly a Conservative member who did nothing for 10 years, especially after the Quebec NDP members pressured him to do so. The Conservatives never did anything when they had the chance.

Today, they are talking a good game as though this were important to them, but their actions speak volumes. In fact, as actions speak louder than words, I had the opportunity to table an amendment to include respect for workers and the protection of federal public servants in the motion. It was an extremely simple amendment that pretty much said the same thing the Conservatives are saying, but obviously, they have no intention of walking the talk, since the sponsor of the motion, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, rejected my amendment.

Why are the Conservatives refusing to add a simple clause to protect jobs? When a party says something but refuses to put it in writing, they show their true colours.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is completely wrong about the Quebec Bridge.

The Conservative government of the day put \$75 million on the table, the Government of Quebec put \$23.5 million on the table, the City of Quebec put \$1.5 million on the table and the City of Lévis put \$500,000 on the table. The latter two were talking at the time, so we took action. We did not find a solution, but we never made a promise with a deadline. We will take no lessons from the NDP.

Speaking of lessons, the NDP introduced an amendment today. The New Democrats are all over the map. Sometimes they say yes and sometimes they say no. Sometimes they are in favour of a single tax return and sometimes they are not. Today, we are debating a principle. We are not trying to make political hay like the NDP. We are taking care of Quebecers. The motion that we moved this morning was very clear and we will debate it until the end of the day.

Business of Supply

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not too long ago, in 2004, Yves Séguin, then the Quebec finance minister, called for a single tax return. In 2008, the Bloc Québécois took up that call on behalf of Quebecers. Fourteen and a half years have passed since then, four and a half under a Liberal government and 10 under a Conservative one.

Why should we now believe the Conservatives and their call for a single tax return?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I admire my colleague and I thank her for her question.

We cannot change the past; we can only change the future. We must not look backward; we must look forward. Maurice Duplessis' provincial government asked for this, and the matter could have been settled then. Now it is 2019. We are standing up and we are saying yes to Quebecers because Quebec's National Assembly recently adopted a motion. We are here to serve Canadians and Quebecers.

The Deputy Speaker: I can see that many members have questions and comments to share. I can assure all members who have risen that I will give them the floor when it is their turn. We will keep going, and I will make sure those members have an opportunity to participate in the debate.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to speak to today's motion, and to follow up on that great speech from my colleague for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

In the 2015 election, the Liberal Party made a number of promises. Many of their best-known promises were spectacularly broken early on in their government, like the promise to run a relatively small deficit, strictly for the purpose of building infrastructure, and then to balance the budget by 2019. They blew every part of that campaign promise.

They promised they would create a brand new voting system. They promised to do away with the first-past-the-post system. They promised to hold an open competition to replace Canada's aging fighter jets. They promised to hold themselves to the highest possible standards for openness and accountability.

We know that all of these promises have been thoroughly broken. The government does not even admit to having ever made any of these promises in the first place.

However, today I want to draw to the attention of members of the House and those who are watching this debate or who will read about it in Hansard, that the Liberals in 2015 promised to deliver a "client-focused Canada Revenue Agency". That was their promise. I would like to draw everyone's attention to page 33 of the Liberal Party's platform, where it says:

The Canada Revenue Agency exists to serve Canadians. We will overhaul its service model so that people who interact with the CRA feel like valued clients, not just taxpayers.

Today's opposition motion is a perfect opportunity for the government and its Liberal caucus to actually deliver on an election promise, and at the same time give Canadians in Quebec something that will make their lives simpler and less expensive: a single tax

return. Most Canadians who have never lived in Quebec probably did not know that Quebecers have to file two separate tax returns and have had to do so for decades.

This is a long-standing irritant to Quebec tax filers and something that any Canadian can understand. Nobody relishes filing their tax returns. It is complicated enough just to file one return, so today the opposition calls upon the government to work with the Government of Quebec to implement a single tax return in Quebec, as adopted unanimously in the motion of the National Assembly of Quebec on May 15, 2018.

All parties in Quebec support the idea of the Quebec government working with its federal counterpart to give Quebecers a single return. This is not a controversial proposal in Quebec. Quebecers are tired of having to file two forms or having to pay a third party to file two forms. The Liberal government that has done so much to make life more expensive for all Canadians, including Quebecers, has an opportunity today to make good on its promise to make the Canada Revenue Agency more client focused, and give Quebec a single tax return.

After being elected with a campaign promise to improve the taxpaying experience of Canadians, let us examine what the government has done over the past three years. The government started out by giving a mandate letter to the Minister of National Revenue, which said, "As Minister of National Revenue, your overarching goal will be to ensure that the CRA is fairer, more helpful, and easier to use."

Giving Quebecers a single tax return certainly might be one way to make the CRA easier to use, but the mandate letter also goes on to say that the minister is to "lead the government's work to overhaul its service model so that people who interact with the CRA feel like valued clients, not just taxpayers", which is right from the Liberal Party platform.

Again, this opposition motion gives the minister a perfect opportunity to actually take a concrete step toward fulfilling her public mandate and an election promise, yet the minister and the government have completely given up on even pretending to keep their election promises or carry out the tasks contained in their mandate letters.

The minister's mandate letter, of course, also contains the standard line about upholding the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, ensuring the highest standards for ethical conduct, and upholding the principles of openness and transparency. These are all laughable now, given the numerous conflicts of interest, the ethical lapses of her cabinet colleagues, and both the minister's and her department's failures to be open and transparent in this House, at committee, in Order Paper questions, and in response to access to information requests.

Business of Supply

●(1255)

The minister and the department under her management have been anything but open and transparent. Today's motion is again a perfect opportunity for the minister and the government to make amends with Quebec tax filers, who, like other Canadians, have been subject to the spectacular failings of the minister and the department under her watch.

Since being sworn in as a minister under a promise and with a mandate letter to establish a more service-oriented agency, the minister has lashed out at some of the most vulnerable Canadians while making absolutely zero measurable progress in the fight against tax avoidance and tax evasion.

It was under the minister and the Liberal government that the agency mused about taxing employer health benefits. It was under the minister and the Liberal government that the agency targeted retail and service employees by announcing its intention to tax retail employee discounts and complementary meals for restaurant employees. It was under the current government, under the minister's watch, that the agency began targeting tips earned by minimum wage-earning restaurant servers and their employers.

It was under the current government and this minister that the agency targeted parents, especially single moms and dads, with onerous, sometimes impossible requirements just to prove that they are parents and entitled to child care benefits. It was under the current government that the finance minister decided to go to war with small businesses, calling them tax cheaters, creating new and onerous requirements for family-owned corporations, and attacking their life savings through draconian new taxes.

It was under—

●(1300)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there is a conversation taking place across the way, and it is almost to the point where we cannot hear our colleague, who is just a few seats down from us. I would ask that members take their conversations somewhere else.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I hope the Conservatives take that advice on board in question period.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank both members for bringing this to the attention of the Chair with respect to the noise in the chamber. There is always a certain amount of low-level conversation in the House from time to time when members are speaking. Admittedly, if it gets to a point where it is disruptive or interferes with the ability of other hon. members to hear what members are saying, that is the point where we like to intervene.

The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I will also point out that it was under this minister that the Auditor General tabled not one, but two damning reports on this agency. One report pointed out that under the minister's watch, the CRA ran a call centre that hung up on 64% of the people who contacted it. It also said that the 36% of callers who could actually get through to the agency had about a one in three chance of being given incorrect information about how to comply with the Income Tax Act.

The other report was presented at what, unfortunately, was to be the Auditor General's final appearance at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It was the report that said that under this minister, the Canada Revenue Agency would automatically disallow a deduction or expense for ordinary Canadians, but if the tax filer had offshore accounts, the agency would wait months or even years, and sometimes simply close the file without assessing any other taxes.

None of these actions is consistent with the Liberals' promise to deliver an agency focused on service for Canadians. The Prime Minister, his revenue minister and his entire government have utterly failed Canadians.

Today, the House has an opportunity to at least make life a little easier for Canadian tax filers who live in Quebec, by reducing their paperwork, their aggravation and their costs, and simply agreeing to work with the province of Quebec toward the goal of giving Quebecers a single tax return. They do not have to give the opposition credit. They can just pretend they were listening to Quebecers and do it.

A motion was passed unanimously in the Quebec assembly. Everybody in Quebec agrees with this idea. The opposition is here to help the government make the right decision, and we hope Liberals will take that opportunity today. I will say that at the 2018 national convention, over 90% of Conservative Party delegates voted for this policy. Delegates from coast to coast to coast, who want their lives simplified and their compliance costs lowered, supported Conservatives.

Today, members of the House have an opportunity to take the side of tax filers. It is disappointing that only Conservatives seem to be listening to this concern from Quebec's tax filers.

●(1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge for his comments.

[*English*]

One thing that is not noted explicitly in the motion that the Conservatives brought forward today, but which is implicit, is the fact that Quebec is obviously asking that it be the organization that would administer the tax. In a way, it is either a decentralization or a capitulation of federal sovereignty and oversight over certain aspects of tax law from the Government of Canada to Quebec, which I am sure would be of interest in Calgary Rocky Ridge.

It really comes to a head in two particular points with respect to the tax. The first point is that single tax return administered by Quebec could be an obstacle to compliance with Canada's legal obligations internationally under tax agreements if we were to do what the member is asking for, which is to hand over the reins to Quebec.

The second point is that Quebec, like all other provinces and territories, does not have collection powers outside its territory. Of course, collecting federal tax is a national enterprise and Quebec does not have the authority.

Business of Supply

Therefore, it seems to me that at least in his jurisdiction it would cause problems for tax filers with operations in both Calgary Rocky Ridge and Quebec City, for instance, to get the full tax due. If the member can explain his plan to remedy that, I am sure that would help satisfy me with respect to his argument.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the member packed a lot in there, and the entirety of that question cannot be answered in the time I am allowed.

Today, let us at least agree in principle, as certainly the voters of Calgary Rocky Ridge would, that having two tax returns is an onerous requirement for tax filers. I do not think anybody in Calgary Rocky Ridge would want other Canadians to have to do twice the paperwork to file a tax return.

The member raises some issues that clearly are real issues. However, can we not at least agree in principle that this ought to be done, and that it would make life much simpler for Canadian tax filers? Let us allow the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada to work together to make life simpler.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing two things here. The Quebec members in the Conservative Party are saying that Quebec will do the form. The member is not saying that, because it would be unpopular in the rest of Canada if he said that Quebec would do the form.

We in Canada have shared jurisdiction in the level of taxes. The federal government and nine provinces chose to harmonize their definitions and have certain exceptions that are very different from the distinctive path that Quebec has chosen. In order to have one form, every accountant I have spoken to has told me that we would need to have a harmonized definition between Quebec and at least the federal government.

Is the hon. member asking Alberta and all the other provinces to change their definitions to be the same as Quebec's definitions, or is he suggesting that Quebec lose all its distinctiveness and harmonize its definitions with the rest of Canada because that is what is required to achieve this resolution?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, it is great to see the squirming and the excuses made on the Liberal side in order to avoid even attempting to make life simpler for Quebec tax filers. I understand fully. There have been administrative agreements. There is precedent. We understand in Alberta. We know that Quebec collects its own GST through an administrative arrangement between the two levels of government.

I see no reason why something similar could not be achieved if we put the effort into working together to make it happen. All we hear from that side are excuses for why we should not try to do something that would make life simpler for Quebec tax filers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the two responses the hon. member just gave prove that the Conservatives are not serious about this. When asked important questions on the impact that this proposal will have on where we go from here, the Conservatives are unable to provide specific answers. If the Government of Quebec becomes the tax collector, that will

raise questions of jurisdiction regarding federal taxes collected from jurisdictions other than Quebec.

My colleague also talked about the definition of income. His colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord also explained the definition in great detail. He said the definition of income is different in Quebec because certain expenses are taken into account to calculate income.

Does my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge prefer Quebec's definition of income or the definition used in every other province?

● (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, obviously, much work will need to be done, but I point out that today's motion does not drill down into these kinds of details.

I cannot possibly debate an overhaul of how income tax is collected. We could get into all kinds of issues if we allowed ourselves to. The motion merely calls upon the government to work with the Government of Quebec to implement a single tax return. We are voting yes or no on the motion today. I am very disappointed that other parties cannot, even in principle, agree to support the motion dealing with the principle of a single tax return for Quebec filers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I finally have the floor. I could not wait to talk about this motion. I will share my time with the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

I am pleased to rise today to debate the implementation of a single tax and benefit return for Quebecers, to be managed by Revenu Québec.

I must say that I was a bit surprised earlier to hear someone from Calgary speak for Quebecers and know what Quebecers want. That was very hard to fathom.

Collaboration with our provincial and territorial partners is essential to build a stronger economy and create good jobs for all middle-class Canadians.

Our government is well aware of the fact that provincial and territorial governments face the same challenges as the federal government. We also acknowledge the crucial role that communication plays in making sure that the efforts we are making to overcome these challenges come to fruition. Efficient governance requires partnerships between all levels of government. Only by working together will we bring about positive change.

Since the election of a new government in Quebec last October, our government has been focused on building a relationship based on trust and open dialogue. The Prime Minister met with the new Premier of Quebec a few days after the election during the Sommet de la Francophonie in Armenia.

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It was a major opportunity, during which countries and governments of the Francophonie gathered to tackle common issues, especially building economies which are beneficial for all, addressing climate change and reinforcing democratic institutions. During their conversation, the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec agreed to work together to face common challenges, like attracting foreign investments and creating new opportunities for all Canadians.

Our common priorities were clearly established: together, we continue standing up for workers, creating good jobs and building a strong economy for all regions of Quebec. We have worked with provincial and territorial governments no matter what party they belong to. Improving the lives of Canadians is not a partisan issue.

In Canada, provincial and federal ministers quickly set up a dialogue and, since then, have met several times multilaterally, which means federal-provincial-territorial meetings, as well as bilaterally, in order to discuss and advance issues of common interest.

Last December, during their meeting, the Prime Minister and the premiers identified fields of interest common to all governments, in particular the economy, the environment and transport. The meeting took place in Montreal, and it was the first time a first ministers meeting occurred in Quebec in half a century. This shows our will to give new impetus to our cooperation.

In January, at a cabinet retreat in Sherbrooke, Quebec, federal ministers had an opportunity to participate in meetings and round tables with Quebeckers, local representatives, and representatives from the private and non-profit sectors. This retreat provided a unique opportunity to hear directly from Quebeckers about their concerns, priorities and daily lives.

During this visit, the Prime Minister met with the Premier of Quebec to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as strengthening the economy; investing in infrastructure, which is very important in Quebec and in the rest of Canada; addressing the skills shortage in Quebec; and dealing with immigration. The skills shortage is a big issue in Quebec.

As an aside, I want to address the member for Mégantic—L'Érable's comments that he is prepared to have the 5,500 employees in question relocated. I cannot get over his interpretation of what it means to improve lives. It is not easy to relocate 5,500 employees, especially when they are in Jonquière and Shawinigan.

● (1315)

Of course, immigration was also discussed. That discussion highlighted two important issues for Quebec, namely immigration and the essential role that skills development plays in growing Quebec's economy.

As is the case across Canada, needs are increasing due to an aging population and changes to trade agreements and new technology, which are all significant factors in the Montreal area.

The Quebec economy is now stronger than it was three years ago. I can testify to that because three years ago, in my riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, my constituents told me that, for couples, one of two

jobs was always precarious. Since our government came to power, the economy is doing a lot better.

Over the last three years, the Government of Canada has signed a certain number of bilateral agreements with the Government of Quebec, including important asymmetrical agreements in the health care sector. Those agreements dealt primarily with mental health—and we know how important that is—home care for our elderly, early childhood education and child care.

We also worked closely to meet needs related to infrastructure, agriculture and the environment.

Several bilateral negotiations are under way regarding federal government compensation for temporary housing of asylum seekers, labour market transfer agreements and an asymmetric housing agreement.

We have seen encouraging results, and we have built a relationship with the new Government of Quebec that is based on collaboration and that should help us sign those and other agreements in the coming months.

We are proud to help build a Quebec that addresses the concerns of its citizens. Whether it be infrastructure, agriculture, health care or the fight against climate change, the Government of Canada wants Quebeckers to know that it is their partner.

The decades-long partnership between the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec ensures that Quebeckers have an efficient tax system that respects Quebec's autonomy and ensures good jobs in the regions. I will say it again, we are talking about 5,500 jobs in Quebec, in the Shawinigan and Jonquière regions.

Quebec is the only province in Canada with a separate tax administration to collect its personal income and business taxes. That is the choice that Quebeckers made and we have respected it.

We have made a lot of progress in restoring and strengthening ties between the Canada and Quebec governments. We always will to that. Quebeckers deserve nothing less.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can we trust the Liberals? I would like an answer from my colleague opposite. The Liberal government has not kept any of its promises since it was elected, except for legalizing marijuana, which it did haphazardly.

The Liberals have been unable to crack down on tax havens. They even gave out contracts to KPMG, which is swimming in murky waters, when it comes to tax havens. They have not even been able to pay their employees. How can they tell us today that Quebec cannot effectively administer its own income tax returns? They are already administering the GST and the QST.

Why can Quebec not administer the income tax returns? Unlike this government, Quebec is the only tax authority that honours its commitments.

● (1320)

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, if Quebec is responsible for tax administration, it is not because we do not respect provincial and federal jurisdictions.

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Canada is the one that has signed international tax agreements and information exchange agreements with other countries.

The government works together with Quebec. We are always ready to collaborate.

Earlier, the Minister of National Revenue said in her speech that we would not dive into a lake without checking how deep it was. These are delicate issues, they require time, and we must study the facts before taking action.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what the government did not do.

She used the analogy of a lake, saying we should be able to see the bottom before jumping in. I am not sure that analogy totally works here, incidentally.

The problem is that the government has done no due diligence to confirm whether it was possible, whether there were any solutions or whether such a proposal was even a good idea. It simply dismissed it outright.

Why did my colleague say it is important to see what is at the bottom of the lake, when she did not even bother taking the time to do so herself? She did not even look at what was there. She simply decided to stay on the shoreline. Why did she not check to see what was at the bottom of the lake?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I was simply using a metaphor when I mentioned that before jumping into a lake we should check how deep it is. Studies must be based on facts. One cannot simply toss around promises to relocate these 5,500 employees. Come on. The motion talks about improving the lives of Canadians and Quebecers. Asking them to leave Shawinigan or Jonquière and moving them somewhere else will not improve their quality of life. That is not the right way to work for Quebecers and Canadians.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 5,500 federal employees in Shawinigan and Jonquière will keep their jobs. We will ensure that they keep their jobs in the administrative agreements that we will sign as soon as we take office in October.

The member said that she would rather help 5,500 public servants, who are merely being asked to make a bit of a transition, than the 8.3 million Quebecers who clearly stated during our “Listening to Quebecers” tour that they want a single tax return. The member is also going against the 125 members of the Quebec National Assembly, who together represent the 8.3 million Quebecers who said that they want a single tax return. She is going to protect 5,500 individuals at the expense of 8.3 million people.

Is that what the member is trying to tell us right now?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I am pleased that a Conservative is asking me that question because, in their 2012 budget, the Conservatives eliminated 1,200 jobs at the Canada Revenue Agency. They made \$250 million in cuts. We cannot trust the Conservatives to manage

the CRA properly. What they are saying right now is an election gimmick. I hope that they will tell all Canadians what they are saying here and what they are saying to Quebec, and that they will not send two different messages.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth) and to the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to talk about the important work the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec have undertaken to reduce red tape for Quebecers.

The Conservatives think a single measure will make filing tax returns easier and more accessible for Quebec residents. They think having Quebec taxpayers fill out a single tax return administered by Revenu Québec is the solution. In other words, they want to pay more for work the CRA is already doing. They want Canada's nine provinces and three territories to adopt the Quebec model because harmonization would be essential. Unfortunately, it is painfully clear that they are desperately trying to win votes in the province of Quebec.

In contrast, Liberals are willing to work closely with Revenu Québec to find workable solutions that will make Quebecers' lives easier at tax time. Rather than make cuts to services, staff and call centres like the Conservatives did for 10 years, we believe access to services, no matter where a person lives in Canada, is what matters most.

• (1325)

[English]

My colleagues will also give the impression that relations between the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec are not strong. I stand before the House today to say that the complete opposite is true.

[Translation]

The Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec have been working together for a long time, for nearly 30 years. Because these two agencies have a long history together, they are able to share best practices and make sure that all taxpayers and benefit recipients across the country have access to the best service they deserve.

Unlike what my colleagues would have us believe, the relationship between the agencies is solid and ongoing, and it applies to both personal and corporate income tax administration.

[English]

To give an example, the federal government worked closely with Revenu Québec in the lead-up to the GST agreement that was signed in 1990. Since then, the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec have continued to work together to make sure that GST registrants in Quebec receive the same level of service as those who live in other parts of the country. Further, the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec have a proven collaborative relationship in ensuring that the tax administration of the goods and services tax is consistent nationwide.

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[Translation]

I should also point out that the Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for administering a fair tax regime used by all Canadians, including residents of Quebec. With this objective in mind, the agency has implemented new services designed to simplify the tax return process for all Canadians, including Quebecers.

Many of these new services are designed to improve access for those Canadians who choose to file their returns online. Quebec residents obviously benefit from these improvements, considering the fact that more than 85% of Quebec taxpayers file electronically.

[English]

Why is that important for this debate? Tax preparation software already proposes simplification and presentation of the two declaration forms in one process by auto-filing the information in both declarations when the system requires the same information, already simplifying the process for the 85% and more of Quebecers who file their taxes online every year.

[Translation]

The Conservatives mentioned the complex nature of the returns, but seem to be completely unaware that few Quebecers use paper forms anymore. Quebecers now have updates for the software packages used to prepare their tax returns, which make it easier to fill out the two forms. The information on the forms can now be auto-generated, thanks to new features. In other words, all boxes are automatically filled out.

Many initiatives such as auto-fill my return, file my return, express NOA and ReFILE have already been implemented to simplify the tax return preparation process for all taxpayers and benefit recipients.

[English]

With these digital services, Canadians can file or change their income tax and benefit returns online through one simple process, and as just discussed, 85% of them will be using an online tool, and those numbers just continue to go up.

For example, Canadians use NETFILE and EFILE to file their returns online. ReFILE allows them to submit amendments through the service. Auto-fill my return helps individuals and authorized representatives using certified software to automatically fill in parts of a return. Express notice of assessment allows individuals and authorized representatives to view the notice of assessment in their software right after the return has been received and processed by the Canada Revenue Agency.

● (1330)

[Translation]

Moreover, the file my return service helps low-income Canadians and those on a fixed income. It makes it possible for eligible Canadians to file their returns by answering a few questions through an automated phone service. In 2018, 50,000 returns were filed in Canada with this service, which will again be available during this tax season.

I would also like to mention the improvements made to services for entrepreneurs and small businesses operating throughout Quebec

and in other provinces. I am referring to the liaison officer service. Owners of small businesses can ask to meet with a liaison officer to discuss their taxes. This service is free and gives business owners the opportunity to get answers to their questions.

[English]

These results speak to the long history of close collaboration between the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenue Quebec and to the commitment of our government to making filing one's income tax and benefit return easier.

Let me reiterate. Our efforts to simplify the tax return process in Quebec have been strong and are ongoing.

[Translation]

Above all, it is very important to ensure that Canadians are using the best services available so that they can file their tax returns easily and receive the benefits and credits to which they are entitled. Let us be clear: we will never renege on this commitment.

In closing, I would ask my Conservative colleagues to do their homework. Like the NDP, they should reconsider their position. I am talking about the Conservatives not just from Quebec, but also from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the three territories. They should take the time to look at the details. A single tax return is not just a matter of an administrative agreement. It is about harmonizing one system with another. It is about using the same definitions for income, asking nine provinces and three territories to change their ways, and using taxpayers' money to pay more for a service that the Canada Revenue Agency already provides.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find this debate very interesting. What has been happening in the news in recent months or for a little more than a year is also very interesting. We can see that the very root, the core identity, of the Liberal Party has not changed.

Every time that Quebec asks the Liberal government for something, whether it is in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s or today, the answer is always no.

Mr. Couillard, the former premier, asked if there could be a dialogue on Quebec's place in the Canadian Constitution. The Prime Minister dismissed it out of hand. He did not even want to have a dialogue.

Recently, Quebec asked for more autonomy in immigration. The Liberals said that they would look into it, but that means no. The National Assembly, the 125 members representing 8.3 million Quebecers, unanimously called for a single tax return, and the Liberals today are saying no, without any shame.

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Why is it that the core identity of the Liberal Party of Canada since 1867 is still to answer no to Quebecers and the province of Quebec when they ask for more power in their areas of jurisdiction?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see the Conservatives talking about Quebecers, because for 10 years they did not care about them at all.

It is funny that we are talking about this now. They were in power for 10 years. Why was this not an important issue when they were in power? It has now become the most important thing in the world. It is both funny and not. They are wasting our time with this motion today.

The reality is that we have a system in place that works very well. Now, in January and February of this election year, we see them starting to play games by pretending that they want to take care of Quebecers. We know that this is a joke, because for 10 years they did absolutely nothing.

•(1335)

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to understand my colleague when he says he wants to make life easier for Quebecers. He listed a bunch of measures that have been implemented to make it easier for people to file their tax returns. However, when it comes to a single tax return, which would make life easier for Quebecers, the answer is no.

Let us go back in time. On December 1, 1997, the Liberal government of the day signed a labour transfer implementation agreement with Quebec. The agreement provided for the transfer of 1,338 employees.

If it was possible in 1997, why is it no longer possible in 2019?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, we now know there is no reason to change the current system. As I just explained, at least 85% of Quebecers file their taxes online using a system that puts both tax returns together. They only need to file one tax return online.

Why are we wasting the time of the 338 members of the House? Because we are in an election year. The Conservatives are fishing for votes in Quebec; that much is clear. However, we will not give the Conservatives the opportunity to eliminate jobs in Quebec and across Canada. That is their record. They cut \$400 billion from the CBC, \$500 million from the RCMP and 1,200 jobs from the Canada Revenue Agency. They will continue doing the same thing if they return to power in this country, but we will not let them do it.

[English]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague really hit the nail on the head and took the wind out of the sails of this motion. He said that we essentially already filled out a single tax form through the software we bought. That is much simpler than what is being proposed on the other side. Hon. members on the other side were saying that we would have a new organizational chart, new technologies within the department to merge the two systems and this, that and the other thing.

Have we not seen what the Conservatives do when they implement new technologies? They leave civil public servants unpaid. Imagine if that chaos occurred across all taxpayers in Canada. What does the hon. member have to say about that?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, based on the record of the Conservatives, one thing we know is that when it comes to public servants, the faster they can get the knife out to cut them the better it is for them. The reality is that they are promising to Canadians that all the jobs will be kept when moving over to a new system, a system that we do not need and Quebecers and Canadians do not need.

Every time the Conservatives have been given the chance to improve on a system, civil servants have paid the price. Their record is \$500 million in cuts from the RCMP, \$400 million from the Canadian Border Services Agency and hundreds of millions of dollars from the Canada Revenue Agency. Now they are asking Canadians to trust them once again with a new system that is going to protect jobs. I do not think so. We are not going to give them that chance.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who will certainly build on what I have to say.

It is always an honour to speak in the House. I want to say hello to the people of Beauport—Limoilou who are watching us. Today, we are debating a single tax return for Quebecers.

The member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges has said some pretty unbelievable things. He asked why the Conservatives raised this topic this year, which is an election year. In reality, we actually talked about this matter in May last year, at our general council meeting in Saint-Hyacinthe. There were 400 Conservatives at this meeting, including members of the Bloc Québécois who were tired of the pointless bickering. The Bloc Québécois will never be in power. At this general council, we adopted the motion calling for a single tax return. The motion received the support of the vast majority, 90%, of attendees. It was quite popular.

That said, introducing this motion at the Saint-Hyacinthe general council was not a casual idea plucked from thin air. Our political lieutenant for Quebec and other Quebec Conservative MPs held public consultations, consultations we called "Listening to Quebecers".

We held consultations in about 40 municipalities all across Quebec, covering all of Quebec's regional districts. Quebeckers themselves told us they wanted us to simplify their day-to-day lives. Then, a month later, in May 2018, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion calling on the federal government, regardless of the party in power after the October 2019 election, to start working on an administrative agreement that would enable Quebec to collect federal taxes and then transfer that money to the federal government. The ultimate goal was to make Quebeckers' lives easier and give them a much easier way to do things.

I would like to re-read the motion for those watching at home because it may not be written out in full at the bottom of their screen. The motion states:

That, given:

(a) the House has great respect for provincial jurisdiction and trust in provincial institutions;

(b) the people of Quebec are burdened with completing and submitting two tax returns, one federal and one provincial; and

(c) the House believes in cutting red tape and reducing unnecessary paperwork to improve the everyday lives of families; therefore,

the House call on the government to work with the Government of Quebec to implement a single tax return in Quebec, as adopted unanimously in the motion of the National Assembly of Quebec on May 15, 2018.

That is the motion that our political lieutenant, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, moved this morning.

Why do we want the House to adopt this motion? As I said, over the past few months, we consulted with most Quebeckers as part of our province-wide consultation process. They told us that they needed this to happen because they are fed up. That is what they said. They are fed up with filling out two tax returns.

The Conservative Party of Canada has always had one fundamental goal, which we pursued under the leadership of Mr. Harper when we cut taxes through 163 different measures. Clearly, the most popular measures were the ones that cut the GST from 7% to 6% and then from 6% to 5% and those that sought to cut red tape in half for all federal departments. It just so happens that the Liberals kept this administrative formality because they know how important it is. It is one of the good things they have done so far.

We are also moving forward with that, because it reflects the desire of all elected officials from Quebec. That desire was reiterated a year ago, as I said at the start of my speech.

There is a bit more of a personal reason that residents of Beauport—Limoulu may not be familiar with. I have knocked on 40,000 doors in my riding. I continue to do so. I even did it this Saturday in -20°C weather. I once again thank the volunteer who was with me that day. He was brave to follow me. The member for Louis-Saint-Laurent also went door to door. All the Conservatives in Canada did that.

• (1340)

Saturday, I knocked on the doors of about 50 homes and the topic came up many times. That idea was put forward publicly by the Conservative Party before the Bloc Québécois began talking about it and well before the unanimous motion in Quebec's National Assembly, because we had heard about it on the ground and we respect Quebeckers. Our fundamental goal in politics is to make life

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easier for all Canadians, and particularly to avoid them having to pay for the Prime Minister's mistakes in the future.

Today, we have learned something important in the House, and I asked the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges a question about this, namely, the fact that the true identity of the Liberal Party of Canada is clear for all to see. Perhaps it does not reflect on all of its individual members, although they are part of it, as they are involved in it, but fundamentally, it is a centralist party that does not care about the demands of Quebeckers for greater control. It does not care about the constitutional anguish and anxiety of Quebeckers. In particular, there is no desire to improve the lives of Quebeckers and Canadians through its government policies.

On the contrary, we have never seen a government spend so much money on so few results for individual Canadians. We sometimes get the impression that the government is working for the bureaucracy and government programs instead of working for Quebeckers and Canadians in general. We have seen that identity throughout history. In 1867, George Brown and the Red Party did not want a large federation like Canada created by two founding peoples working hand in hand

From 1867 to today, we Conservatives have maintained our constitutional and political openness to the grievances of both founding peoples and the legal grievances of the Province of Quebec. Remember the total affront by the Liberals in 1982 when they repatriated the Constitution without the consent of Quebec's National Assembly. We see history repeating itself.

In 1982, Quebec's National Assembly did not sign the Constitution. As the bastion of the Francophonie in North America, Quebec certainly had a prominent place at the table. Even political conventions and jurisprudence clearly reflected Quebec's crucial role in the matter of the repatriation of the Constitution, but the Liberals, in their arrogance, brazenly repatriated the Constitution without Quebec's signature, just as they are now brazenly and shamelessly dismissing the unanimous request by the National Assembly regarding a single income tax return.

Under Mr. Mulroney, we resumed an honourable and enthusiastic dialogue. We made every possible effort, despite the extreme pressure on all sides from the elder Mr. Trudeau. We reached the Charlottetown and Meech Lake accords; we tried to bring Quebec into the fold. Later, Mr. Harper entered into administrative agreements, because the time was not right. People did not want a constitutional debate. Just as our leader, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, would like to do, Mr. Harper entered into administrative agreements that helped Quebeckers in their everyday lives, while waiting for the time when we might see a constitutional debate. Later, he got a seat for Quebec at UNESCO, the last thing the Liberals would have done, and the Bloc Québécois would never have had the power to do, as they will never be in power.

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Not only did we get a seat for Quebec at UNESCO, but we also acknowledged the existence of the Quebec nation in this assembly, in this Westminster Parliament, on North American soil. We acknowledged that the Quebec people formed a nation within a united Canada. Mr. Harper did that. It was not the Liberals or the Bloc Québécois, who could never do it, as they will never be in power.

What party increased its number of seats in Quebec in the last election? It was not the Bloc Québécois, it was the Conservative Party, which won 12 seats. Unfortunately, due to their many promises, the Liberals were able to win many seats. However, that will change, as they are unable to keep their promises. As the deficit will not be eliminated this year, they will raise taxes over the coming days, months and years if they are re-elected.

By all appearances, this is the same party as it was back in the day. By its very identity, the Liberal Party of Canada has no respect for Quebecers or for areas of jurisdiction.

• (1345)

A few days after being elected, the Prime Minister and member for Papineau went to New York and told a newspaper that Canada had no national identity. Really? Canada has no national identity? That is not what Quebecers think. Quebecers will never be well served by the Liberal Party of Canada. With our leader, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, we will give them more independence in their areas of jurisdiction when they seek it.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to hear the speech from the member opposite. I sat on a committee with him a year ago. It was really interesting. I enjoy his passion. I will ask the same question that I asked the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

As a Liberal from Newfoundland, I do not oppose the wish to decentralize government when doing so makes sense. We are willing to put the power where it belongs, close to the people most affected by what we want to do.

However, there are two things for which there has not been a good answer this morning. The first is the fact that a single tax administration managed by Quebec could be an obstacle to Canada's compliance with its legal obligations under international tax agreements. The second is the fact that Quebec, like the other provinces and territories, does not have the authority to recover funds outside its jurisdiction. Can his proposal address these two issues?

• (1350)

[English]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I know the member and respect him. We were on the OGGO committee together. He spoke to me in French so I will speak to him in English.

Do members know why the Liberals speak about the technicalities of the matter? It is because they do not want to talk about the matter at hand, which is whether they are for or against our ideas. They are against them. Every time the government talks about complexities and technicalities, it is because it does not want to face reality.

This is a good idea. It does not come from them. It comes from us. More than that, as I said during my speech, it is not possible for Liberal MPs in this land to do differently from what they are doing today, because this is part of their core identity.

They do not want to respect decentralization. They do not believe in federalism. They do not believe in this country. They believe that everything should be centralized in Ottawa. First and foremost, they do not believe in French Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's remarks.

Earlier, in another speech, he tried to pit the 5,500 employees of the Canada Revenue Agency in Quebec against the 8.3 million Quebecers who are affected by this issue. I think that this highlights exactly what the Conservatives think about this issue. They continue to do what they always do, which is to divide and conquer. That is what they are trying to do today. They will not admit it, and it seems that he avoided, perhaps intentionally, doing so in his speech as well. It appears as though they do not want to keep dividing people, as the member himself did earlier when he pitted the 5,500 families and communities that depend on these jobs against 8.3 million Quebecers.

Can he clarify his thoughts on that and tell us if he is really trying to play these groups against each other?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, how typical of Canadian socialists. It is the opinion of the majority, because Quebec's National Assembly voted unanimously for a motion asking the federal government to begin administrative-level talks on a single tax return. It is always the same thing: every time the majority goes against what they believe in, Canadian socialists say that the majority's opinion is hogwash.

I am not the one pitting Quebecers against each other; the Liberals are. I am not the one disrespecting Quebecers; the Liberals are. The Liberals are not the ones who will increase Quebec's jurisdictional powers; the Conservatives will be, after October 21, 2019.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member. We have heard similar arguments in the past. In the 1980s, Conservative members told Quebecers that they were forgotten, that Quebec was different and that the federal government did not have Quebec's interests at heart. What happened? The Bloc Québécois became the official opposition, the Reform Party was born and the Conservative Party disappeared. There was also the referendum in 1995.

[English]

To the hon. member, you are playing a very dangerous game in saying one thing in English and one thing in French, one thing to Quebec, one thing to Canada. Why are you playing the game of Quebec separatists, because that is exactly what you are doing?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Statements by Members

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. members that they must address their comments to the Chair and not directly to members opposite.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[English]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, it is this party which has repatriated the Constitution without the Quebec National Assembly. It is the Trudeau father who put huge pressure on Newfoundland not to open on the day of the Meech Lake vote. This is the reality of history.

• (1355)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable has about five minutes to begin his speech. He can continue his comments when debate resumes after question period.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): I heard some other voices while you were speaking, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, they were the voices of Quebec MPs from the Liberal Party of Canada. They were saying that five minutes is more than enough. Five minutes is never enough to talk about the interests of Quebec. I could talk about that all day. Five minutes is not enough.

Of course they do not want us to talk at length about this because having to hear Quebec's demands inconveniences them. It inconveniences them when we take up an issue that Quebeckers want, that the National Assembly voted on unanimously, that the Premier of Quebec wants, that the majority of Quebeckers want. Our supporters want it. The majority of their supporters want this too, but they would never admit it. They say that five minutes is enough for the MP. I will talk about this for five minutes and I will talk for another five minutes. I will talk about this all day. I will talk about this for as long as I can.

The Liberal members will remain silent on this, especially the ones from Quebec because they do not stand up to defend the interests of Quebec.

I heard the Minister of National Revenue's speech this morning. I debated whether I should raise a question of privilege or rise in the House about something she said at the beginning. I did not really understand her remarks, which started as follows:

My colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable—who, I should point out, was mayor of a single-industry town in a region of Quebec that was hit hard by a difficult employment situation—has been accusing me these past few days of fearmongering regarding the single tax return.

That is all she said. How am I supposed to interpret that? Is that supposed to be some kind of threat, because I stood up for the people of Thetford Mines, when all of the asbestos mines shut down after the then leader of the Liberal Party of Canada said that asbestos had no future in our country? Is that it? How am I supposed to interpret that?

Mr. Michael Ignatieff was the first leader of a major political party in Canada to say that asbestos was finished. Since then, thousands of workers have been laid off in my riding.

Today, I hear the Minister of National Revenue accuse us of having fought for our jobs. That is totally unacceptable. I will always stand up for people in Quebec, but I will especially stand up for the people of Mégantic—L'Érable. I will not accept statements like that.

Since this debate started, the minister has shown us that she is completely disconnected from the reality of Quebeckers, who want a single income tax return. On several occasions, the minister accused us of fearmongering. The only ones who threatened anyone with losing their jobs was her, her Prime Minister or the people on that side of the House.

It has been clear to us from the beginning that it is possible to do away with one form without affecting public servants. It is simple enough with a bit of good will and a simple willingness to trust Quebec and Quebeckers. Why would it not be possible to agree, to have a meeting, discussions and exchanges to make an entirely legitimate request by Quebec possible, namely the possibility of Quebeckers filing a single income tax return?

They will say that we say something different in Quebec from what we say in other provinces. In other provinces, there is only one income tax return. It is not that we say two things, but there is a single tax return in every other province and we only want one here, in Quebec. What do the members opposite not understand about that?

We want a solution. There is a problem for Quebeckers. We want a solution and we will not be held hostage by a centralist government's desire to hoard all the power. We are prepared to trust Quebec and Quebeckers with a single income tax return, but we are told no.

In the beginning the Prime Minister said that the Liberals were open to discussion. Then, he suddenly changed his tune. This morning, he said that he does not share the same goal as the Government of Quebec and its premier. What caused this shift? The fact is that the Liberals realized that it made sense and that they would lose a bit of their power if Quebec was allowed to have a single tax return. There is the problem. They do not want to let go of their power. They are addicted to it. History tells us as much.

• (1400)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable will have five minutes to continue his speech after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the month of February we celebrate the contribution of Quebeckers from black communities to our shared history. We invite everyone to participate in the many activities taking place across Quebec to mark Black History Month.

Statements by Members

The 28th edition in Montreal will focus on emancipation and the accomplished women who emerged from black communities. In Quebec City, the spotlight is on our thousand and one roots. Different activities will be held across the province, from Rouyn-Noranda to Gatineau to Rimouski.

Let us seize the opportunity provided by the many conferences, workshops and panels to learn more about the contributions of different black communities to the Quebec identity, and their history, which we hear too little about.

Let us enjoy the many artistic activities and celebrate the creativity that sets us apart, in Quebec, in all our diversity.

* * *

[English]

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the beginning of the lunar new year for members of the Canadian Chinese community and Seollal for the Korean Canadian community. We mark the arrival of the Year of the Pig, a great symbol of prosperity.

The lunar new year is an opportunity for members of our communities to reflect on the successes of the past year and to look forward to new beginnings. It is also a great time to build deeper connections with our friends, families and neighbours.

On behalf of my riding of Willowdale, I wish to mark this happy occasion as a year filled with peace, prosperity, good health and great happiness. *Gong xi fa cai. Gong hey fat choy. Gong xi. Gong xi. Xin nian kuai le. Saehae bok manui badeuseyo.*

* * *

PARKLAND FOOD BANK

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, February 23, the Parkland Food Bank Society is hosting its annual Coldest Night of the Year fundraising walk in support of those in the Tri-Municipal Region who are hungry, homeless and hurting.

In my riding of Sturgeon River—Parkland, we have been particularly hard hit by the challenges in the energy sector. Families who could once depend upon a reliable job are doing without this year, and organizations like the Parkland Food Bank are needed now more than ever.

This year the food bank's goal is to raise \$50,000 to assist families that are struggling. I encourage everyone in Parkland County, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain and beyond to donate their time and assist with this great cause. Together we can help ensure that no one in this great country goes without.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tonight I invite all parliamentarians, senators and their staff to attend the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada reception. PIPSC represents over 60,000 public service professionals across Canada, and a lot of them live in Orléans.

Every day, public servants work hard to strengthen the middle class and improve the lives of all Canadians.

[Translation]

That is why public servants deserve to be paid on time and accurately for the important work they do. There has been progress, and we will keep working to stabilize the system until our public servants are paid accurately, on time, every time.

[English]

We are going to solve this pay problem.

Join me this evening to recognize the hard work these public service professionals do for all of us from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today 1.5 billion people worldwide celebrate the lunar new year. Across the country, events are held to ring in the Year of the Pig. This past weekend I celebrated with the Korean community with food, song and dance. The Vietnamese community, which is vibrant from Vancouver to Toronto to Montreal, cherishes the values of respect for human rights and the environment and began its celebration with the honouring of the ancestors.

Aside from numerous gala dinners hosted by clan associations, this Sunday, Vancouver's Chinatown will once again be packed with people from all walks of life for the annual lunar new year parade. Central to the celebrations are family and friends.

As I invite all of Canada to celebrate the Year of the Pig, I also ask the government to eliminate the cap for parents and grandparents sponsorship so that all hard-working Canadians who have helped build our country can unite with their loved ones.

I wish everyone good health and prosperity in the Year of the Pig.

Chuc mung nam moi. Gong hey fat choy. Xin nian kuai le.

* * *

●(1405)

[Translation]

VALCOURT SKI-DOO GRAND PRIX

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the riding of Shefford is very proud to be hosting the biggest winter race event in the world. The 37th Ski-doo grand prix will be held in Valcourt, birthplace of the snowmobile, from February 8 to 10.

This winter event brings together hundreds of athletes from around the world and tens of thousands of snowmobile fans in search of speed and adrenaline.

Statements by Members

This unique and inclusive tourist event is literally a winter festival full of activities for the whole family. It is also a major economic driver for the region, generating over \$6.5 million in revenue.

The event is made possible thanks to the hard work of the Valcourt Ski-doo grand prix team, the dedication of 300 volunteers, and the support of many sponsors. I wish everyone an excellent 37th grand prix, and I would remind my esteemed colleagues that Ski-doo is how we roll.

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[English]

KIDS ON TRACK

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize Kids on Track, an amazing charitable organization in my riding of Edmonton West. Kids on Track is a volunteer driven, grassroots community organization with a passion for offering hope, direction and support to kids, youth and parents.

Founded by Linda Roussel, Kids on Track has a 17-year track record of delivering ministry to urban kids in Edmonton, with a focus on at-risk youth and families. Last year over 1,000 kids, youth and parents were helped by its programs, including after-school leadership mentoring through its character clubs, offered in 14 high-needs schools; community family meals and activities; extensive summer programs; and support groups for kids navigating a family breakup.

I thank Linda, her husband, Craig, director Franc and all the volunteers. Their service makes Edmonton a better place to live.

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CANADIAN DAIRY FARMERS

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by recognizing the presence of the dairy farmers from my riding and from across Canada who are here today. Canadian dairy farmers work day in and day out to produce safe and high-quality milk for Canadians.

[Translation]

I had the chance to visit a number of dairy farms in my riding and see first-hand how hard our dairy farmers work. The dairy sector contributes a great deal to our rural economy, and we are lucky to have dairy farmers in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Dairy products are an excellent source of nutrients. I encourage all Canadians to support our farmers by looking for the little blue cow when buying their dairy products.

[English]

The best way to support our Canadian dairy farmers is to look for the blue cow.

[Translation]

I thank all Canadian dairy farmers for their excellent work. I hope to see all members of the House this evening.

DELEGATION FROM ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to welcome a delegation from Abitibi-Témiscamingue to Parliament Hill today. It is an opportunity for them to see our new House of Commons and see where MPs work, but also to tell us more about the issues that affect their regions and all rural regions.

I would like to thank them for the interesting discussions we have had on the various issues that affect rural regions in Quebec and across Canada.

I would also like to thank my colleagues who helped make today such a success. Our government understands that people living in Canada's rural regions have needs that are different than those of people living in urban centres.

I join the Minister of Rural Economic Development in welcoming the delegation from Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

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[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the silent generation has a message to deliver to a Prime Minister who keeps raising taxes to make their lives more expensive. Generations X, Y and Z are not interested when he says, "I no longer have dealings with the way our family fortune is managed", the fortune his grandfather made from oil and gas. They are not interested in being crammed into state housing when they want to be able to afford to buy their own homes. They do not want to subsidize someone else's environmentalism in California or China when municipalities in Canada dump raw sewage into our lakes and rivers. Canadians are offended by the double standard of the Prime Minister groping a female in public and refusing to be honest about it.

It is time for the Prime Minister to come clean, tell the truth and let Canadians know by how much he is going to hike his carbon tax.

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● (1410)

[Translation]

ÉRIC CHASSÉ

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the future seems uncertain if we do not learn about and learn from history. Éric Chassé, a resident of Saint-Hubert, in my riding, has taken on this mission in his role as a history teacher at the École internationale Lucille-Teasdale.

This mission won him the Governor General's History Award in 2018. He taught his students a love for history, science, architecture, French, math, sociology and art, using a unique project on historic buildings in New France.

Statements by Members

Mr. Chassé has every reason to be proud of this prestigious award. I also want to acknowledge his wife, who has joined him on this adventure, and all of his students, who are lucky enough to share this passion and love for history and our beautiful country.

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[*English*]

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the first day of the spring festival, or the lunar new year. In my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, we celebrate lunar new year with many diverse communities.

Lunar new year is more than just a celebration for Asian communities. It is now celebrated widely across Canada. Everyone can enjoy the festive events, appreciate the new year foods and get together with friends and family.

According to one legend, the pig was the last to arrive at the zodiac table, but the pig persisted in its efforts to arrive. Those born under this sign are both diligent and generous. As we welcome the Year of the Pig, I would like to wish all Canadians a year filled with happiness, prosperity and longevity.

Chuc mung nam moi. Saehae bok manui badeuseyo. Shen ti jian kang. Wan shi ru yi. Gong hey fat choy.

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[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord are going to pay dearly for the Prime Minister's mistakes: the broken relationships with our trade partners and allies; the purchase of a pipeline at an astronomical cost; the diminished confidence in our immigration system; and, above all, the out-of-control spending and permanent deficits. Not to mention that there is no plan to balance the budget.

There is no doubt that the Prime Minister is going to increase Canadians' taxes and make their lives more difficult. When asked if he manages the country like he manages his own finances, he said that he no longer has dealings with the way his family finances are managed. It seems that he does the same thing with the country: He simply doesn't look after its finances.

The people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Canadians deserve better. Fortunately, they will be able to take a positive, dynamic and honest step next fall by voting for the Conservative Party and its leader, a real leader with integrity who accepts his responsibilities, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

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[*English*]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as part of Black History Month, we celebrate the many contributions of black Canadians to our country and acknowledge the racial discrimination that continues to face black Canadians living in our communities today. In Nova Scotia, the black community has been part of our

province for over 400 years and has been facing discrimination ever since.

In 1946, at the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, just minutes from my home, Viola Desmond was arrested for refusing to leave the whites-only section of the venue. Her refusal to accept racial segregation and her courage in taking a stand for racial equality helped kick-start a revolution that improved the lives of thousands of people living across Canada. I am incredibly proud that she now graces our nation's \$10 bill, which serves as a reminder of the racism that permeated our social fabric for so many years.

Other inspirational local stories, such as the No. 2 Construction Battalion, Canada's first and only black battalion, and Henderson Paris's Marathon of Respect and Equality, give us hope that leadership from within the black community can help change the attitudes of our entire society.

However, we all have a duty to combat racial discrimination, so this month and every month after, when I see Viola Desmond on the \$10 bill, I will be reminded that we have to remain vigilant to ensure we are not discriminated against on the basis of the colour of our skin.

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BUD ABBOTT

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to share with members today the life of an amazing man.

Bud Abbott was born on January 26, 1921. During his life, he was a British fighter pilot during World War II; a family man to his wife Linda, his children Louise, Christopher, Becky and Greg, and to his grandchildren and great grandchildren. a Rotarian; a volunteer for mental health; the Salvation Army; Meals on Wheels; Heart and Stroke; reading with elementary school children; singing with seniors; and starring in community theatre. He was Cranbrook's leading man for 59 years.

What made Bud truly amazing was he did all of this up until just a few weeks before his 98th birthday, with an incredible memory for music, an insatiable desire to learn and a passion for theatre and for the people of Cranbrook. He was a community icon, a model for how to live our lives as seniors and a much-loved friend to many.

Bud died on January 30. The city of Cranbrook, my riding of Kootenay—Columbia and, indeed, all of Canada have lost an amazing man.

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● (1415)

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, life keeps on getting more expensive under the Liberal government. Whether it is increased payroll taxes, the carbon tax or the Liberal massive deficits, one thing is clear: the government has a spending problem. The scary thing is that the government does not even recognize that it has a problem. It flaunts its reckless spending and chastises the very idea of fiscal restraint, even though it campaigned on returning to a balanced budget this year.

One thing is certain. Today's deficits turn into tomorrow's taxes. The Prime Minister does not seem to mind, though. His entire plan depends on making life more expensive for Canadians.

Canada's Conservatives understand that this is not sustainable and that is why we are proud to be the only party in the House to care for taxpayers.

* * *

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to join the many Canadians celebrating lunar new year and to take this occasion to acknowledge the important role and contributions of Asian-Canadian communities in Canada.

In 2019, we celebrate the Year of the Pig, an animal symbolizing wealth and good fortune. During this time of new beginnings, we reflect on successes of the past year and look toward new opportunities.

In Vancouver Quadra, the University Neighbourhoods Association always hosts a colourful and fun family event, and in Vancouver, Chinatown's Lunar New Year Festival day is legendary. I cannot wait to attend these and many other celebrations to mark the lunar new year with friends and constituents.

I wish all Canadians a successful Year of the Pig, replete with peace, happiness, good health and great prosperity.

Xin nian kuai le. Gong hey fat choy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, the Prime Minister met with the Premier of Quebec for a one-on-one discussion. The Prime Minister promised to consider the possibility of Quebec having its own single tax return.

The problem is that this morning, the Prime Minister slapped Quebecers in the face. He closed the door on simplifying life for the people back home by giving them the chance to have a single tax return. On May 15, the National Assembly of Quebec voted unanimously in favour of a motion calling on the federal government to respect Quebec.

Will the Prime Minister stand up and tell his MPs to give Quebec the chance—

The Speaker: Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course I will always stand up for the interests of Quebecers just as I stand up for the interests of all Canadians. That is why we are standing up for Quebecers' jobs and for the 5,500 people in Shawinigan and Jonquière employed by the Canada Revenue Agency.

We just invested in a new building for the work they do in Shawinigan, and we will always find ways to fight for Quebecers'

Oral Questions

jobs and their interests while making sure we do what is good for Canada too.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one said anything about job losses. We are talking about a single tax return for Quebecers, like everywhere else in Canada. A single tax return will make life easier for Quebecers, reduce red tape and administrative overlap, and respond to a unanimous formal request from the Quebec National Assembly.

Enough with the fearmongering. All we are asking the Prime Minister to do is to show some respect for Quebecers and allow them to have a single tax return just like everywhere else in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister agree to Quebec's request, yes or no?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are always pleased to work with the Government of Quebec to simplify the tax return process, but it is important to remember that the Conservatives are proposing to eliminate the jobs of 5,500 Canada Revenue Agency employees in Quebec.

If there is no longer any work left to do on tax returns in Quebec, of course those jobs are going to be at risk. The fact that the Conservatives do not understand that shows that they are completely out of touch with what is happening in the lives of everyday Canadians.

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[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister famously said, "I no longer have dealings with the way our family fortune is managed." It is a good problem to have. Unfortunately, because he has never had to balance a household budget, he thinks budgets balance themselves. He is not worried about costs, because he makes others pay for his mistakes.

The problem is that his never-ending deficits will sooner or later lead to higher taxes. Will he be honest with Canadians and tell them, before the election, how much taxes will go up and who will have to pay?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the members opposite do not understand anything about transparency and accountability. I put my portfolio in a blind trust so I could work on the responsibilities as a leader, and indeed as a prime minister, with impartiality.

It is interesting that the Conservatives will not ask that same question in English that was just asked in French about giving to Quebec a single tax filing. I will always stand up to defend the interests of Quebecers and indeed all Canadians. I will also stand up for what is good for Canadians and stand against pandering to the provinces.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Blind trust, Mr. Speaker. What the Prime Minister is asking taxpayers is to blindly trust him that he can spend a great fortune, amass enormous debts, set on track permanent and growing deficits and trust that no one will ever have to pay for it.

Canadians do not have inherited family fortunes. They know that budgets do not balance themselves. Will he tell them the real cost that his taxes will impose on everyday Canadians after the election?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years the member opposite and the Conservative government, under Mr. Harper, kept giving tax breaks and benefits to the wealthiest Canadians in the hope that would lead to growth and opportunity for all Canadians. It did not. It failed miserably because, under Stephen Harper, Canada had the worst growth record since the Great Depression.

We made a different choice, to lower taxes for the middle class, to invest in folks who needed our help with things like the Canada child benefit, the guaranteed income supplement increase for seniors and the Canada workers benefit. These are the things that have made a difference.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is funny to listen to a trust fund baby lecturing Canadians about being too rich.

The Prime Minister says that people who take the bus are too rich and therefore should lose their transit tax credit. Soccer moms and hockey dads, the Prime Minister says are too rich, so he takes away their children's fitness tax credit. At the same, he forces these same working-class families to pay for his taxpayer-funded nannies.

Will the Prime Minister put aside the hypocritical class warfare and tell us the true cost of his tax increases that he would bring in if he got re-elected?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Yet again, Mr. Speaker, we see proof that the Conservatives simply do not understand that low-income families do not benefit from tax breaks because they do not pay taxes. We will move forward on investing directly in low and middle-income families with the Canada child benefit that will actually directly benefit them.

We have lifted hundreds of thousands—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the opposition House leader and others to come to order and not to be yelling when someone else has the floor.

The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, non-refundable tax breaks do not benefit low-income families. That is why we changed the Conservatives' way of sending tax breaks to millionaire families and instead giving the money directly to families that needed it.

[Translation]

PHARMACARE

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is the only country to have universal health care without universal pharmacare. Every study on the matter shows that universality is the way to go. Once again, the Liberals signalled left before turning right when they promised universal pharmacare. They never had any intention of getting in the way of the pharmaceutical lobby or the insurance lobby. Essentially, the Minister of Finance got what he wanted all along, in other words, some sort of private-public patchwork that will be a bureaucratic nightmare and will do nothing to reduce costs.

Why did the Liberals cave in to their friends on Bay Street yet again?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of our public health system. However, many Canadians are paying too much for their prescriptions. No one should have to choose between their prescriptions and groceries. In budget 2018, we created the advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare. This council of experts consulted Canadians and weighed the options.

We look forward to seeing their final report. It will guide us on the best way to implement the national pharmacare program and make prescriptions more affordable for everyone.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course, Canadians are proud of their medicare system. We want a pharmacare system similar to medicare.

I would like to remind the House of the motion adopted at the Liberal Party convention stating that “the Liberal Party of Canada officially adopt the support for a national-universal PharmaCare program as one of its policy priorities”. The current situation is alarming. Canadians do not buy the medication they need anymore because they cannot afford it. One in five people do not take their medication due to their exorbitant cost. It would appear that the Liberals decided to protect pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies in defiance of their own motion.

Why not stand up—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is once again making up stories and using scare tactics. We are waiting for the report of the expert panel tasked with finding the best way forward. The NDP is already jumping to conclusions. They want to scare people. The reality is that we will be moving forward to make sure that Canadians pay less for their prescription drugs. We know that it is important, and we intend to keep our promise while the NDP continues to talk and talk.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP invented medicare. Now we are inventing pharmacare.

Oral Questions

The vast majority of Canadians believe pharmacare should be a seamless extension of our existing health care system. Everybody who has studied this issue has come to the same conclusion, yet we just learned the Liberals plan to adopt a patchwork, fill-the-gaps approach. Funny, that is exactly what the drug and insurance companies want.

Instead of caving in to corporate interests, why will the Liberals not stand up for lower costs and better coverage for Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are rightly proud of our national health care system, however, many people pay too much for prescription drugs and nobody should have to choose between prescriptions and food.

Budget 2018 created an advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare. It is consulting with Canadians and assessing the different options. We look forward to its final report, which has not been released yet despite the NDP's musings. It will guide us on the best way forward on national pharmacare and making prescription drugs more affordable.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the finance minister's musings that Canadians are worried about.

The Liberals are protecting profits, not patients. The reason we need a comprehensive, universal and public system is that we will not achieve the results we want without it. A public system provides purchasing power, streamlined administration and value for money. This is why Canada pays less than the U.S. does for medicare, and it will do the same for pharmacare.

Why are the Liberals intent on copying the U.S.-style private, patchwork system that costs more and delivers less?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see the NDP grasping at straws, inventing theories and conspiracies, and trying to scare Canadians.

We take very seriously the responsibility to move forward in ways that make medication more affordable for Canadians. That is why we tasked the panel of experts to look into it, to make recommendations and to come back with a solid plan for us. We look forward to hearing what it has to say. We are not going to jump to conclusions like the NDP is doing.

* * *

● (1430)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, four years ago almost to the day, the Prime Minister shared a new economic theory with the entire world: "The budget will balance itself". In the past four years, no one but him has dared to repeat that in a serious manner because everyone knows it is ridiculous.

Just a few minutes ago, the Prime Minister said something that will come as a surprise to millions of Canadians. He said that low-income Canadians do not pay taxes. Is that so? Those people do not have to pay GST?

Could the Prime Minister rise and tell low-income Canadians that they do not pay taxes?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the good news is that, under our government, middle-class and low-income Canadians pay fewer taxes. That is clear.

We lowered taxes for the middle-class. We injected even more money into the Canada child benefit. That is really helping low-income and middle-class families. Canada is better off as a result of our policies because families are better off. Our approach is good for the economy and good for families.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Prime Minister did not have the opportunity to repeat his economic theory that is far-fetched, ridiculous and, above all, inapplicable for Canadians.

We know that the Liberal carbon tax will be applied from coast to coast in a few weeks. We also know that the government has in hand a study that it commissioned to find out how far it would be willing to go to pay the carbon tax, which could be as much as \$300. That means almost \$5,000 more that Canadian families will have to pay.

Will the Prime Minister's ridiculous theory apply once again and will Canadians not pay any tax? That cannot be.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, we have all-party support to put a price on pollution. Only the Conservative Party here thinks that polluting should be free.

We have a plan to reduce pollution, invest in good jobs and grow our economy. We will continue to do so.

What is the Conservatives' plan to fight climate change?

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not being up front with Canadians. Government documents reveal that the Liberals have a plan to hike their carbon tax 15 times higher than it is today. That is an annual \$5,000 carbon tax for all Canadian families, including those families that are struggling, unlike what the Prime Minister just stated earlier. That may be peanuts for the Prime Minister, who inherited a great family fortune, but the average Canadian cannot afford it.

Why is the Prime Minister covering up the actual cost of his carbon tax until after the election?

Oral Questions

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will speak directly to Canadians. We are putting a price on pollution and we are giving all the money back. The party opposite knows that. They like spreading misinformation.

For a family of four in Ontario, we have a price on pollution and a family will receive \$307. That is more than eight out of 10 families paid. They can save more money if they invest in energy efficiency.

The party opposite has no plan for the environment and no plan for the economy.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government does not have an environmental plan. It has a carbon tax plan, a plan that will see taxes rise on all families, including low-income families. Government documents show that the Prime Minister's carbon tax will be 15 times higher than the Liberals now admit but only after the next election. The Prime Minister wants to cover up the true cost of this carbon tax until after the election, but Canadians want an answer now.

Why is the Prime Minister forcing struggling families to pay for his mistakes with this punishing new tax?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy once again to talk to Canadians and counter the misinformation that the Conservative Party continues to spread. It does not seem to believe that climate change is real and that it is having a real impact. Let me be clear. Where there is a price on pollution, where it is a federal price, we are returning the revenues so families will have more money in their pockets.

One can take action on climate change, make life affordable and create good jobs. Unfortunately, the Conservative Party does not know that the environment and the economy go hand in hand.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that he no longer has dealings with the way his family fortune is managed. Struggling Canadians do not have family fortunes and do have to manage their finances. They know they cannot afford a carbon tax. Secret government documents reveal that taxes will soar after the next election, costing taxpayers up to \$5,000 extra per year.

When will the Prime Minister come clean, tell the truth and let Canadians know how much he plans to hike his carbon tax by?

• (1435)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was one person in the House of Commons who voted against the Paris Agreement and who voted against climate action. It was the member who just asked the question right now.

Maybe other members of the party do not support it anymore, because they are clapping, but guess what. We are all in this together. We need to take serious climate action. We owe it to our kids and grandkids. We also have a huge economic opportunity. We are going to make life affordable and we are also going to take action for our kids and grandkids.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this has nothing to do with the environment. All it has

to do with is simple Liberal ignorance. At the end of the day, the Prime Minister says that struggling Canadians do not pay taxes. He could not be more out of touch with every Canadians' reality. Here is the deal: Every single Canadian across this country who works pays payroll taxes, EI and CPP. They pay GST, HST and now they pay a massive carbon tax imposed by the current government.

My question is simple and I am hoping that through the ignorance he can answer it. When will he stop punishing everyday hard-working Canadians by imposing more taxes?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to be very clear. The Liberal Party, our government, voted in favour of reducing taxes on middle-class Canadians. We went further than that. We introduced significant increases to the Canada child benefit, helping families do better as they raise their children. The Conservatives voted against these changes, so what they did was put forth their plan, which was not to reduce taxes on middle-class Canadians and not to increase benefits.

We have decided that the most important way we can help those families is to actually lower their taxes to make sure they are in a better situation for the future.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 1.4 million children are living in poverty in Canada, and more than a third of them rely on food banks to eat. These statistics are alarming and unacceptable.

I am fed up with the Liberals' talking points, as they keep saying they have lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. That is smoke and mirrors, considering that over one million kids are still suffering. The Liberals are not doing enough to lift children out of poverty, and I am not the one saying so; Food Banks Canada is.

When will the Liberals do more?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to once again emphasize how much of a priority it is for our government to help middle-class families and help more families join the middle class.

We introduced a historic measure called the Canada child benefit. Since July 2016, every month, it has helped lift 300,000 children out of poverty, along with the 200,000 parents who live with them. This historic measure is changing families. These are not talking points; this is having a real impact on families every day.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for weeks thousands of youth in Europe have been mobilizing and calling for real action in the fight against climate change. Here in Canada, students are also prepared to take to the streets. In Davos, a young Swedish girl named Greta made a touching appeal for the future of her generation.

What have the Liberals decided to do? They are providing oil companies with billions of dollars in subsidies, they are wasting our money on a leaky old pipeline and they are going to miss the Conservatives' weak targets.

When will the Liberal government listen to young people and take seriously the urgent need to address climate change?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand and talk about our ambitious plan to fight climate change.

We are putting a price on pollution in the country. We are investing historic amounts in renewable energy. We are eliminating coal, and we have a plan for a fair transition for employees and communities. We are working hard to support clean technology businesses and to create good jobs. We have a plan for the environment and the economy because they go hand in hand.

* * *

[English]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government promised a client-focused Canada Revenue Agency and to crack down on offshore avoidance. It has failed spectacularly. Tax professionals and taxpayers across Canada say that compliance has become harder under the government and a single tax return would simplify life for Quebeckers.

Why will the Prime Minister not listen to Quebeckers and give them a single tax return?

• (1440)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are the government that has reinvested the most in the Canada Revenue Agency to improve services to Quebeckers and Canadians. On this side of the House, we have a plan that gets real results.

The Conservatives have no plan when it comes to the single return, just as they have no plan for job losses and tax evasion. Let us not forget climate change. We are not about to see what the Conservatives' plans are on that front. They have been promising one for months.

Oral Questions

The Conservative slogan for the 2019 election will be “No Plan”.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we ask questions in English and in French and we only receive answers in French, but apparently that is not the same.

The minister is proving how completely disconnected she is from Quebec's reality. She said earlier that there are two definitions of “income”, one for Quebec and one for the rest of Canada, and that is why we cannot go ahead. When a worker gets his cheque, the amount is not different whether he is a federal or a provincial worker.

Why do the Liberals not trust Quebeckers regarding the single tax return?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will always reply to my colleague opposite that I will never be ashamed of speaking French, because—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives say that implementing a single tax return involves a simple administrative agreement. Well, that is not the case. Real people work at the Canada Revenue Agency. I was in Shawinigan yesterday and I met the 1,300 employees. They are real people.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the U.S. State Department urged its allies to bring home and prosecute its citizens currently held in Syria who committed terrorist acts for ISIS. Although ISIS has been reduced and destabilized in the region, our allies remain concerned that it could re-emerge. The Liberals have been deafening in their silence on how they plan to deal with Canadians who have committed terrorist acts for ISIS.

What is the government's plan to bring these terrorists to justice?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we condemn the horrific and cowardly acts of Daesh and take with the utmost seriousness the threats posed by travelling extremists and returnees. Those who leave Canada to fight for terrorism are utterly reprehensible and our goal is to arrest, charge, prosecute and convict.

All Five Eyes and G7 allies are working together to help collect and preserve the necessary evidence.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not a plan to take our national security seriously. Last year, the House adopted a Conservative motion calling for a comprehensive strategy to bring Canadians who have committed acts of terrorism for ISIS to justice, but the Liberal response was a total failure.

Oral Questions

The Liberals continue to ignore our allies in the face of this global security threat, making Canadians pay for their mistakes. Why will the government not take this seriously and bring these terrorists to justice?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, wherever the evidence exists, charges are laid and prosecutions are pursued. I would note that of the very small number of returnees who have come back to Canada from the Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish theatres, four have already been charged and at least three have been convicted. None were charged or convicted under the previous government.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today 9,000 people are homeless in Toronto and many more are at risk. There are 180,000 people on lists who are waiting for affordable housing. Prominent activists, artists and business people are calling this a state of emergency, urging all governments to get to work.

The Prime Minister said housing rights are human rights, and I agree, but year after year, the story is the same. Why will the Liberal government not step up, get this right and give all Canadians a safe, warm place to call home?

• (1445)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although stories of that sort are very sad, it is always very important for members of the House to hear them. That is why from day one we made it very clear that every Canadian has a right to a safe and affordable home. That is why we have invested more than \$5.7 billion since 2016 in helping a million families across Canada. That is why November 22, 2017, was a historic date. At that time we announced the first-ever national housing strategy, which is going to decrease chronic homelessness by at least 50% and give hundreds of thousands of Canadians a safe and affordable place to call home.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the trend of announcements continues, after four years of governing, the Liberal government may end up having completely overlooked the needs of the people of Mauricie.

Here are some examples. There was an announcement about a pyrrhotite study, but the results will not be available until 2024. As for the construction of a new taxation data centre in Shawinigan, work will begin, at best, in 2022.

The government seems unable to meet the needs of the people of Trois-Rivières right now.

How much longer will we still have to wait before work on the high-frequency train begins? Can we expect an achievement out of this government or an announcement for a hypothetical mandate?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for allowing me to remind all my colleagues of all the things we have done for the people of Mauricie.

One of the first things we did, together with the Prime Minister, was to hear the plea for help from pyrrhotite victims in Trois-Rivières. Thanks to the Minister of Finance, we invested \$30 million in the first budget to help pyrrhotite victims.

I think it takes some nerve for a colleague to question today what we have done for the people of Mauricie. We are there for them. Our voice is strong. We will continue to invest in the regions of Quebec because we have a vision for these regions.

* * *

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the University of Guelph is a leader in research.

On Monday, our government announced \$22.7 million in funding to support 37 research projects across the country through Genome Canada.

Could the Minister of Science and Sport tell the House how our support for research will help improve the lives of Canadians?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for everything he does for Guelph.

[English]

Investments like these help Canada remain a world leader in research, including in genomics research, which has enormous potential to improve Canadians' health, create jobs of the future and solve some of the challenges faced by our agriculture, energy and resource sectors.

After a decade of funding cuts by the previous government, we are returning science and research to their rightful place.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for two years now, the Prime Minister has been scoffing at our questions about the safety and security of Canadians.

He always accuses us of fearmongering, but he does not realize that these questions come from our constituents. The media is reporting that asylum seekers account for 41% of the security backlog, and these people are already here in Canada.

Can the Prime Minister confirm whether this is true, or is the media also guilty of fearmongering?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government will never compromise the safety and security of Canadians and we will not engage in the politics of resentment and fear.

Oral Questions

Regardless of how they arrive in Canada, all claimants are thoroughly screened by the hard-working men and women of CBSA, and they do this in partnership with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the RCMP. Unlike the Harper Conservatives, whose deeds rarely match their rhetoric, we are taking concrete measures to allow our border officers to do their jobs and to ensure they have the resources necessary to protect Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this was reported by the Toronto Star today, not the Conservatives. Is the minister saying that the Toronto Star is instilling fear in Canadians? We will have to see.

We know that some of the asylum seekers have been identified as dangerous criminals. We also know that 11,000 people are awaiting proper security checks. In less than three years, our Prime Minister has managed to create a situation with our immigration system and our borders that is untenable for our officers.

Will the Prime Minister guarantee that the individuals who have not been screened do not represent a threat to Canadians?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me correct the misconception that the member has shared with us.

First of all, let me assure everyone that the CBSA screens virtually everyone who seeks to enter Canada to determine their admissibility. This can happen to a foreign national being issued travel documents, and in the case of all people making asylum claims in Canada, additional screening takes place when they arrive.

I have gone to the border. I have watched CBSA, the RCMP and IRCC conduct these examinations. They take biometrics, photographs and fingerprints. They check the available databases. They screen these individuals to make sure there is no criminality—

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

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the House, let me define what “screened virtually everybody” means: It means 11,745 people were not screened. Many of them illegally entered our country. This was reported today by the Toronto Star. Is this true?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member and all members in the House that every individual who arrives at our border, regardless of whether they arrive at a port of entry or irregularly at our borders, is subject to rigorous background screening to ensure there is no criminality or threat to national security.

What the member may be referring to is part of the process of determining eligibility. There are further screening background checks conducted by CBSA on behalf of IRCC to ensure that anyone who is admitted as an eligible asylum claimant in this country has been thoroughly vetted.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a fairly easy yes-or-no question, and one that Canadians should have an answer to.

Today the Toronto Star reported that 11,745 people have not had their screening completed. Is this true, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to share with the member what is true.

Last year CBSA processed over 90 million entries to Canada safely and securely, as it does each year. It constantly review its processes. Every person who has arrived at our border seeking asylum, irregularly or at a regular port of entry, is subject to a thorough screening before being allowed admission. There are additional screening measures and inquiries made as part of the immigration and refugee eligibility process. Those processes continue well after the person enters the country.

The Speaker: I remind colleagues that the idea here is to have one side talking and then the other, and not everybody at once. We need to be respectful of that process.

The hon. member for Essex.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after being abandoned by GM, Oshawa's auto workers cannot help but feel abandoned by the Liberals too. Conservative and Liberal governments, like this one, have failed to protect Canadian jobs from corporate greed. Because of the Liberals' mistakes, thousands of workers are now fighting for their paycheques, fighting for the future of their families, fighting for their communities.

Where is the Prime Minister? It seems like he has given up. Why is the Liberal government letting GM get away with this betrayal?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will never give up on the auto workers. We will never give up on the workers in Oshawa. We have been very clear that this is a priority for our government.

I went to Detroit to meet with Mary Barra, and I also spoke with Jerry Dias to talk about a solution. If there is a solution to be found, we will be at the table. We have been there before. We were part of the historic investments of \$5.6 billion in the automotive sector, a trend that generated thousands of jobs and reversed the 30,000 job losses that occurred under Stephen Harper.

We got the job done and we will continue to fight for the auto workers.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, access to high-speed Internet in the regions is vital, especially for families, SMEs, self-employed workers and farm operations. Nonetheless, 240,000 households in Quebec do not have an affordable and reliable Internet connection. There is a desperate need, but the Liberals have no plan to bridge the digital divide. The Liberals have failed the rural regions, as did the previous Conservative government.

My question is very simple. When will the government introduce a strategy to get rural regions connected to the Internet?

● (1455)

[English]

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to rise as the new Minister of Rural Economic Development. Our government is committed to ensuring that we have high-quality, high-speed broadband in rural Canada. We know it is imperative for businesses to grow and succeed. That is why we are going to develop a rural economic strategy. Rural broadband will be an extremely important part of that.

I look forward to working with all members of the House to make sure we deliver on that strategy.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just asked the minister a pretty simple question, one he should know the answer to, ostensibly. Today the Toronto Star reported that 11,745 people, many of whom entered our country illegally, have not had their security screening completed. Is this true, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is right that this is a simple question, and I will answer it this way: Everyone who enters our country is subject to security screening by CBSA, and they do this in partnership with the RCMP and immigration.

As part of the process of determining their eligibility, there is an additional process of further screening that takes place, and there is a backlog, as reported by the Toronto Star. However, it is very important for all Canadians to understand that there is no security threat to Canadians, because every individual is screened for security concerns before they enter this country.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one could argue that it would be difficult to evaluate if someone posed a security risk to Canada if their security screening was not completed.

Again, the Toronto Star reported that 11,745 people have not had their security screening completed. Is this true, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone who enters the country, whether irregularly or at a port of entry, is screened to determine their admissibility into the country—everyone, 100%.

As part of the process of determining their eligibility for asylum under IRCC's process, there is an additional screening that takes

place. We are working hard to deal with the backlog that they left to us, and we will complete that process before anyone is admitted as eligible for refugee status in our country.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to this question is not yes and no. The Prime Minister has allowed 40,000 people to illegally enter our country, and today the Toronto Star has reported that 11,745 people have not had their security screening completed.

The minister is in charge of this file, in theory, so he needs to answer this question: Is the screening completed, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone who comes to this country and crosses the border irregularly is thoroughly screened before they move forward into the process of determining their eligibility, so the answer to that question is yes.

There is an additional concern, because as people move through that process of determining their eligibility, CBSA, working with IRCC, does additional security screening. That process is backlogged, and we are addressing that backlog by making significant new investments in making those processes more efficient.

Let me be clear. This is not a security issue.

* * *

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, access to high-speed Internet is still one of the most serious economic and social problems facing Canada's rural regions, and that includes Laurentides—Labelle. Our government and our team have already done a great deal of work, but we still have a long way to go.

[English]

Internet access is key for growing businesses, creating good jobs, getting our Canadian products to global markets and for opportunity in general.

The new Minister of Rural Economic Development has this issue as one of the key priorities in her mandate letter. Could she update the House and rural Canada on her plans for the Internet?

● (1500)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that in order to grow the rural economy, we have to have access to high-speed broadband. It is a commitment we have made in the past.

We have invested in connect to innovate, but we know we need to do more. That is why we are developing a rural economic strategy, and broadband will be a key piece of that.

Oral Questions

I look forward to developing that strategy with people in this House, as well as with my provincial, municipal and territorial partners. We will hopefully have a strategy in the next few months.

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TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's latest justification for raising taxes is this: "Low-income people do not benefit from tax breaks because they do not pay taxes."

Everybody who earns more than \$12,000 a year, which is way below the poverty line, is eligible to pay income tax. They also pay payroll taxes, gas taxes, and numerous other fees and charges governments apply.

How could the Prime Minister possibly help the poor and working-class people when he does not even realize that they pay taxes?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been really clear since we came into office that we would move forward with policies that would help middle-class Canadians and those who are struggling the most to get by.

We have taken measures that have had a material impact. The Canada child benefit is helping nine out of 10 families. We put in place the Canada workers benefit to help people go from not working to work, to enable them to do better. We have put in place additions to the guaranteed income supplement. All these measures are working towards ensuring that middle-class Canadians and those Canadians who are trying to get into the middle class are doing better and better.

That is what they have seen under this government. That is what they will continue to see.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, dairy farmers have repeatedly been used as sacrificial pawns by the Liberal government in international trade negotiations.

Through the signing of recent trade deals, the Dairy Farmers of Canada, who are here in Ottawa today, estimate a total domestic market loss of 18%, which represents \$1.3 billion. The government has still not unveiled the compensation package that was promised.

Since the Liberal government has clearly sided with foreign jurisdictions in appeasing their oversupply problems, when will we see it side with dairy farmers and actually give them the compensation package they were promised?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome all the dairy farmers from across Canada to Ottawa today. It is very important that their voices be heard, and our government has heard their voices.

We have defended the supply management system from a strong American attempt to dismantle it. We understand that the supply management system is vital to our financial success. We will be fully

and fairly supporting the supply management sector. That is why we have formed working groups, to make sure that the information came from the supply sector up to the government.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 10 years have passed since the end of the war in Sri Lanka.

I have heard heart-wrenching stories from the victims of the war. The military continues to occupy land, many languish in jails under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and many more have disappeared. The slow progress towards accountability has shaken the confidence of the victims.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs advise this House of the steps that Canada is taking to hold those responsible to account for the atrocities committed?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the member for Brampton North for her commitment to this very important issue.

Canada called for a marked acceleration of Sri Lanka's accountability efforts directly at the UN Human Rights Council last March, and at the Commonwealth meeting last April.

Canada will join the United Kingdom, Germany, Macedonia and Montenegro as part of the core group in supporting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, working toward the upcoming Human Rights Council session.

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TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the Prime Minister says, "Low-income people do not benefit from tax breaks because they do not pay taxes."

Anyone earning \$12,000 or more, way below the poverty line, is eligible to pay taxes: income taxes, GST, payroll taxes and other taxes.

Does the Prime Minister understand the appalling arrogance of a millionaire trust fund baby accusing the working poor of not paying their taxes?

● (1505)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the positions of the parties in this House have been very clear over the last three and a half years. Our position has been that we are lowering middle-class taxes; the position of the Conservatives is they voted against that. Our position is that we are going to increase the Canada workers benefit to help people get into work; the Conservatives voted against that. Our position is we are helping single seniors with an increase in their supplement; the Conservatives voted against that.

Clearly, we are helping middle-class Canadians and those working hard to do better, and we will continue to do so.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government paid \$4.5 billion to purchase an old pipeline, with no negotiation whatsoever. How much do you want for the Trans Mountain pipeline? \$4.5 billion? No problem; here is a cheque, and let us add another \$9.3 billion to expand the pipeline.

To eliminate the deficit and fight climate change, perhaps the Minister of Finance could stop putting all our money in dirty oil?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know how important it is to give our resources access to international markets. That is why we considered buying the Trans Mountain pipeline. It was very important to our economy and our natural resource sector. We will continue to look into how we can carry out the project successfully.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will continue. I was at \$13.8 billion for the acquisition and expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. To that we can add \$2.7 billion in tax breaks for the oil industry over five years and \$1.6 billion in support for the industry. Then there is \$840 million, if the Liberals buy the railcars to move the dirty oil. In total, that is \$19 billion, just like the deficit.

Is the minister of high finance aware that his deficit—

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Let me talk.

Does the minister of high finance realize that dirty oil caused his deficit?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our resource sector is very important. We know that it is important to have access to international markets. That is why we decided to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline. We will continue with our approach to improving the natural resource sector and our economy as a whole.

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[English]

NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade will know that the Kivalliq Inuit Association has been working very hard to advance clean energy solutions that will create economic development opportunities in the region. This work is fully supported by the Government of Nunavut.

Investments to support projects like the Kivalliq hydro fibre link are fundamental to creating a sustainable economy for Nunavut. Can the minister assure us that advancing critical projects like this to grow and modernize badly needed investments in Nunavut communities will be a priority in the coming budget?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Nunavut for his support of this important project. As members know, we have prioritized reducing the reliance on diesel in rural and remote communities. This hydro fibre link would represent a very important step forward in providing

renewable and affordable energy and high-speed Internet to many communities, and it would open up economic opportunities for those communities.

We have worked with the Inuit association. We have also worked with Premier Savikataaq and his government, and will continue to do so.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness misled the House and that this is not the first time he has done so. Today, he misled the House in response to a question from my colleague from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill regarding ISIS fighters.

Under the Conservative government, charges were laid against three individuals in February 2015. They are Awso Peshdary, John McGuire and Khadar Khalib—

The Speaker: Order. This seems to be a debate on the facts. As the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles knows, the Speaker does not get involved in such debates.

The hon. Minister of National Revenue on a point of order.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, every member of the House has the right to speak in the official language of his or her choice. My colleague's criticism of my choice to speak in French infringes on my rights. What is more, this criticism came from a member who supported the cuts to francophone services made by the Harper and Doug Ford governments. I would ask that he apologize.

● (1510)

The Speaker: That also seems to be a matter of debate.

The member for Mégantic—L'Érable would like to add something on this point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, we rarely answer questions from the government on this side of the House. However, I clearly remember the Prime Minister himself asked us to ask a question in English and in French. We simply asked the same from Liberal members.

The Speaker: This also seems to be a matter of debate.

The member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix on a point of order.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of National Revenue to apologize to the House. I stood up for Franco-Ontarians, and I do not need a lecture from the Liberals.

The Speaker: That also seems to be a matter of debate.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The House resumed from January 31 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:10 p.m., pursuant to order made on Thursday, January 31, 2019, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Saskatoon West, relating to the business of supply.

I remind hon. members of the rule that members are not permitted to pass between the mace and the Chair.

• (1520)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 987)

YEAS

Members

Ashton
Barsalou-Duval
Benson
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boulerice
Brosseau
Choquette
Donnelly
Dusseault
Fortin
Gill
Hughes
Julian
Laverdière
Marcil
Mathysen
Nantel
Plamondon
Ramsey
Saganash
Ste-Marie
Thériault
Trudel

Aubin
Beaulieu
Blaikie
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Caron
Cullen
Dubé
Duvall
Garrison
Hardcastle
Johns
Kwan
MacGregor
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Pauzé
Quach
Rankin
Sansoucy
Stetski
Tootoo
Weir— 46

NAYS

Members

Aboutaif
Aldag
Alleslev
Amos
Arnold
Arya
Badawey
Bains
Barrett
Bennett
Bergen
Berthold
Bibeau
Blair
Block
Bossio
Bratina
Brisson
Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chen
Clarke
Cuzner

Albas
Alghabra
Allison
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barlow
Baylis
Benzen
Bernier
Bezan
Bittle
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boissonnault
Boucher
Breton
Caesar-Chavannes
Carrie
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Chong
Cooper
Dabrusin

Business of Supply

Damoff
Deltell
Dhillon
Doherty
Drouin
Duclos
Dzerowicz
Eglinski
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Falk (Provencher)
Fergus
Finley
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Freeland
Gallant
Gerretsen
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Harder
Harvey
Hehr
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Joly
Jordan
Kent
Khera
Kmiec
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Leslie
Liepert
Lloyd
Lockhart
Longfield
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Soeurs)
Monsef
Morrissey
Murray
Nater
Ng
Nuttall
Oliphant
O'Regan
Ouellette
Paul-Hus
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Poissant
Rayes
Rempel
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Sangha
Saroya
Schieffe
Schulte
Sgro
DeCoursey
Dhaliwal
Diotte
Dreeschen
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Fillmore
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Garneau
Gladu
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Graham
Hajdu
Hardie
Hébert
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Jeneroux
Jones
Kelly
Khalid
Kitchen
Kusie
Lametti
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Leitch
Levitt
Lightbound
Lobb
Long
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Martel
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mendes
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)
Morneau
Motz
Nassif
Nault
Nicholson
O'Connell
Oliver
O'Toole
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Poilievre
Ratansi
Reid
Richards
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Samson
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schmale
Serré
Shanahan

Business of Supply

Sheehan	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simms
Sohi	Sopuck
Sorbara	Sorenson
Spengemann	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Tilson
Trost	Trudeau
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Vecchio
Viersen	Virani
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wizesnewsyjk	Yip
Young	Yurdiga
Zahid	Zimmer — 248

PAIRED

Members

Fry	Moore — 2
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The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

[*Translation*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—TAXES

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made Monday, February 4, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Carleton relating to the business of supply.

• (1530)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

*(Division No. 988)***YEAS**

Members

Abouttaif	Albas
Alleslev	Allison
Arnold	Barlow
Barrett	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boucher	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Cooper	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeshen	Egliniski
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Finley
Gallant	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Harder	Jeneroux
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kniec
Kusie	Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Leitch	Liepert
Lloyd	Lobb
Lukiwski	MacKenzie
Martel	McCaughey (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz	Nater
Nicholson	Nuttall
O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Poillievre	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Saroya
Schmale	Sopuck

Sorenson
Stubbs
Tilson
Vecchio
Warkentin
Webber
Zimmer — 77

Aldag
Amos
Arseneault
Ashton
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Benson
Bittle
Blair
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Breton
Brosseau
Caron
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chen
Cullen
Dabrusin
DeCoursey
Dhillon
Drouin
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duvall
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Garrison
Gill
Goodale
Graham
Hajdu
Hardie
Hébert
Hogg
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Joly
Jordan
Khalid
Kwan
Lametti
Lapointe
Laverdière
Lebouthillier
Leslie
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
MacGregor
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Soeurs

Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Viersen
Waugh
Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Arya
Aubin
Badawey
Bains
Baylis
Bennett
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Bossio
Boulerice
Bratina
Brison
Caesar-Chavannes
Carr
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Choquette
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhaliwal
Donnelly
Dubé
Duclos
Dusseault
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser (West Nova)
Freeland
Garneau
Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Grewal
Hardcastle
Harvey
Hehr
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Johns
Jones
Julian
Khera
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Marcil
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McGuinly
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-

Business of Supply

Monsef	Momeau
Morrissey	Murray
Nantel	Nassif
Nault	Ng
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Pauzé	Peterson
Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Plamondon
Poissant	Quach
Ramsey	Rankin
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rogers	Romanado
Rota	Rudd
Ruimy	Rusnak
Saganash	Sahota
Saini	Samson
Sangha	Sansoucy
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms	Sohi
Sorbara	Spengemann
Ste-Marie	Stetski
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Thériault
Tootoo	Trudeau
Trudel	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Weir
Whalen	Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould	Wrzesnewskyj
Yip	Young
Zahid— 217	

PAIRED

Members

Fry

Moore— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

OPPOSITION MOTION—SINGLE TAX RETURN IN QUEBEC

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, Government Orders will be extended by 17 minutes.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable has five minutes to conclude his remarks. Then there will be a five-minute period for questions and comments.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue my speech on the opposition motion concerning a single tax return for all Quebecers, who are the only ones to not have the option to file just one tax return per year.

I would like to come back to something that happened during question period. During question period, in an answer that the Prime Minister gave to one of my colleagues, we heard him say the following:

[*English*]

It is interesting that the Conservatives will not ask that same question in English that was just asked in French about giving to Quebec a single tax filing.

[*Translation*]

Then I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of National Revenue a question. My colleague and national revenue critic asked

the question in English and then I asked the question in French. I asked the government party whether it was possible to do the same thing that it was asking us to do, which was to answer in both languages so that all Canadians could understand it. It was that simple. If I offended the Minister of National Revenue, I apologize, as that was not my intention. I know that she has been working very hard to learn English. I think it is to the credit of all members of the House to want to learn both official languages. This is very important, and in fact I support several of my colleagues who are trying to learn French. I know that she is working very hard on this.

Since it is the Minister of Revenue's birthday, I apologize if she was offended. That was not my intention. However, I would like the Prime Minister to avoid using the same kind of rhetoric and asking for questions in English or French to try to make us out to be the kind of people who say one thing in English and another in French, when that is completely false.

The Minister of National Revenue may well be celebrating her birthday today, but she is nevertheless completely out of touch with what Quebecers want, with what the Premier of Quebec wants, with what the National Assembly wants, with what Conservative Party members want and with what the majority of Quebecers want. They want people to fill out one single tax return every year.

Emotions are running high because an election campaign is just around the corner. I would like everyone opposite to take two minutes to think about this possibility. Do they think we can make Quebecers' lives easier, yes or no? That is a very simple question. It would not be hard to do. Are they interested in starting talks with the Government of Quebec to find a solution and make a single tax return a reality for Quebecers, yes or no?

Unfortunately, listening to the various answers and to the Prime Minister, it will not be possible. They have closed the door without any discussion. However, that was not always the case. Remember that, the first time the National Assembly discussed this through a unanimous motion, the first reaction from the Prime Minister was to mock the National Assembly, breaking into laughter after saying that the National Assembly had passed a unanimous motion.

It is still the Quebec National Assembly and they are still elected members. Another assembly must be respected. If the Prime Minister wants to speak with members of the National Assembly, he can get elected to it too. No problem. However, given his attitude since the debate, his attitude toward Quebec, his attitude on the issue of the supply ship *Obelix*, his attitude on electoral reform and his attitude about deficits that continue to accumulate and grow, I am not convinced that residents of any riding in Quebec would want such a Prime Minister.

Business of Supply

The question is simple. If we set aside the debates and partisan statements and put a stop to this government's fearmongering about the thousands of jobs at Revenue Canada in Quebec, would it be possible to have a discussion at a more functional level that would encourage parliamentarians to work together to make it possible to create a single income tax return?

I would like to repeat one thing to all the people working at Revenue Canada in Quebec: no jobs will be lost. Those are just scare tactics used by the Liberals. They are fearmongering, although they are the ones who keep saying that the Conservatives are running fear campaigns. That is strange, but in this case I think that the attacks are coming mostly from the opposite side. No jobs will be lost if we do things right and if we do them in the best interests of Quebecers, to make their lives easier.

Let's use the resources we have and rely on everyone's experience and expertise to make this project possible. It seems to me that this is a good project, that it could be achieved together, with Quebec, to show once and for all that Ottawa is not afraid of Quebec and that, to the contrary, it wants to work with Quebecers.

• (1535)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening closely to today's debate.

Between the Conservatives patting themselves on the back for getting the support of the Bloc Québécois, members from the regions of Quebec are taking their turn. This morning, the member for Chicoutimi said that, in his region, jobs were just a detail, that it was complicated and that it would all be sorted out. It is all unicorns and rainbows.

Public servants heard this for 10 years from the Harper Conservatives. They heard it about the Phoenix pay system, they heard it over and over about the draconian cuts, and they heard it about the national shipbuilding strategy. There was nothing for Lévis and the Davie shipyard. We heard it for 10 years.

Why does the member not stand up to his leader and his party to protect jobs in Mauricie, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and in the Outaouais? Why does he not stand up for Quebecers' jobs?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, that is what I am doing at this very moment.

I am telling my colleague, who continues to repeat falsehoods or things that we did not say, that they are fearmongering. I will say it again. I am not going to stand up to my leader, I am going to stand beside him and my colleagues. On October 22, working together, we will give Quebecers back a well-managed country. That is what will happen.

I can also reassure all CRA employees that we made a clear commitment that no jobs will be cut. Can we be any clearer? There will be no job losses.

[English]

There will be no job losses.

[Translation]

That holds true in English and in French. There will be no job losses. I believe that there will be no job losses. In fact, I am saying that a single tax return for Quebec will not result in job losses. Did I mention that there will be no job losses?

• (1540)

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is common sense. I think we need to make the members opposite see reason. Their response should be logical and intelligent.

I have a question for my colleague. Why are Liberal members, the government and the current Prime Minister categorically refusing to support this? They are saying no to Quebec, no to a single tax return, no to the National Assembly and no to the majority of elected representatives of all parties on this side of the House although one of those parties changed its mind a few times.

I would like my colleague to comment on that. Why are the Liberals saying no to a single tax return?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is simple.

The Liberal Party of Canada has always had a centralizing mindset. It wants to control everything. The Prime Minister himself said as much in Saint-Hyacinthe in response to questions about this. He said that many provinces have a single tax return and that Quebec can too—as long as it is a single federal tax return. That is what he told the people of Saint-Hyacinthe. The cat is out of the bag.

Simply put, the Prime Minister does not trust Quebec. It is fine if he is the one running things, but it is not fine if Quebecers are. The Liberals do not trust Quebec. They still see Quebecers as a threat. We, in contrast, will work closely with the Government of Quebec to give Quebecers a single tax return.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hearing such things really makes my blood boil.

First of all, how can the member tell me there will be no job losses, when the Premier of Quebec is the first to say this would save \$500 million? How are you going to save that money? You are going to save it because you are going to eliminate the jobs of all those people who work for the Canada Revenue Agency.

Second, there is a huge difference between Quebec's definition of revenue and Canada's definition of revenue. That is why there are two different tax returns. Quebecers would lose certain benefits if they do not use the same definition as the federal government. The definition is not the same at the provincial level.

Frankly, it is ridiculous.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind hon. members to direct their questions through the Chair. This also applies when they are answering questions.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable has 30 seconds or less.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, it will be difficult because a lot of falsehoods and outrageous remarks have been said in a short time.

Business of Supply

I repeat, there will be no job losses. No jobs will be lost, because we will continue working hard against tax evasion and making sure our civil servants use their expertise wisely. We want to make life easier for Quebeckers by allowing them to file a single tax return.

As I said during question period when I was talking about the definition of “revenue”, regardless of whether the revenue is federal or provincial, the paycheque is the same at the end of the month for the people who pay income tax, for blue-collar workers.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I just heard a member on the other side call me an idiot in the House. I find that completely unacceptable.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I heard the same thing. I would ask the member to apologize.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Mr. Speaker, I said, “How idiotic”, and I stand by that.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, that is what she said.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to remind members that the acoustics are excellent in this House. That said, the microphones only pick up their voices when they have the floor. Therefore, when someone is shouting, the people at home cannot hear it. They only hear the member who has the floor. Only when many members are shouting does it interrupt the person speaking. It would therefore be best if members could respect the person speaking so we can hear the whole discussion. We can make a judgment afterwards.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

• (1545)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will speak for about 20 minutes to talk about the motion moved by the Conservative Party that is being defended by colleagues from Quebec. As a Quebecker, that surprises me.

I want to thank the member for Mégantic—L'Érable for his remarks during question period. He apologized for his remarks concerning my colleague, the Minister of National Revenue. Frankly, I thank him because, in fact, I think that we all agree in the House that we can use the language of our choice, whether it be English or French. I thank him because he did the right thing, and I have great respect for him as a member.

Today, we will be emotional because we are standing up for 5,500 families. That is the issue today. The issue today is not politics. There are 5,500 families that depend on federal jobs. I often say on this side of the House that we have ambitions for our regions. I do not understand how there are still members on the other side of the House who are against protecting jobs in the regions.

I would say that anyone rising in the House today to jeopardize those jobs is irresponsible.

Yes, we are in favour of harmonization. Yes, we are in favour of making things simpler. Yes, we are in favour of modernizing income tax returns for Quebeckers, but we are also in favour of quality jobs in the regions. Yes, we want to preserve those jobs in Shawinigan and in Jonquière.

I have met with families and people with exceptional expertise. They work day after day, as public servants at the Canada Revenue Agency, and they do exceptional work. We should be congratulating them instead of jeopardizing their jobs.

I heard the member for Mégantic—L'Érable talk about respecting the National Assembly. I am happy that citizens have also had the opportunity to hear him and see him on television. Clearly, we have great respect for the National Assembly and its elected members. When the member tells Canadians watching us right now that no jobs will be lost, I do not think he is honouring the institution. If he believes that much in the words of the National Assembly, he should listen to the Premier of Quebec, who admitted himself that this would result in job losses in Quebec.

I rise today to be the voice of those who cannot be in the House. I rise for those who get up each and every day to serve Canadians, especially the workers in Shawinigan, whom we visited yesterday. We had fantastic news for the people of the Mauricie yesterday. We announced that we would not only upgrade the existing building, but also build a new one.

My colleague the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility said it very clearly. For over 10 years, the Conservatives have questioned those families' jobs. We want to put an end to that. Yesterday, we announced a new building to accommodate workers at the Canada Revenue Agency, commonly known in our area as the Shawinigan tax centre.

We will give these workers a green, modern, state-of-the-art building that we can all be proud of. Yes, the people of these regions are proud. Yes, the people of Shawinigan are proud. Yes, people in Jonquière are proud to work for the CRA. Today, we are the voice of these people we visited yesterday.

I heard Conservative members saying that there will not be any job losses. I suggest that they go and speak to the union president. They should go speak to Mr. Pelletier, Ms. Lafond and the director of the tax centre. They will see things in a completely different light. Shawinigan is home to a unique expertise. The Shawinigan tax centre is the largest bilingual verification and collections centre in Canada, and it is located in Quebec.

We should be rising in the House to show how proud we are to be Quebeckers and to have federal jobs in the regions. We should be proud to stand up for those workers who expect MPs to be their voice in the House. I think it is shameful that members are here today playing politics when we are talking about keeping good jobs in the regions.

In 2019, we can harmonize and simplify the tax return process for Quebeckers. We can coordinate efforts between the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec, but we will not do so at the expense of jobs in the regions. We know that our regions are important economic drivers.

Business of Supply

• (1550)

The socio-economic fabric of my region relies on the Shawinigan National Verification and Collections Centre, which represents roughly \$50 million in annual salaries. Probably nearly \$1 billion has been paid in salaries in the region since the centre opened. It is a major economic driver. Yesterday, we could see these people in the gallery watching us here in the House with big smiles on their faces, applauding and thanking us for ending the uncertainty created over the past 10 years. They thanked us for being here to confirm that the work they do is valuable, for believing in their abilities, still believing in Quebec, and believing that the contribution made by these employees can make a difference. We decided yesterday to give them a new building that is worthy of their ambitions.

I see my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois, who are proud Quebecers. I would like to hear them stand up for Shawinigan, stand up for Jonquière. I would like to see people like me, who come from Quebec, who come from the regions, stand in the House and say that our Conservative colleagues are playing politics at the expense of Quebec families, because that is exactly what they are doing.

I hope that my Bloc Québécois and NDP colleagues will continue to stand up and condemn what is happening. Yes, we can be proud to be Quebecers. Yes, we have the right to have jobs in our regions. Yes, we can modernize the system and keep jobs in Jonquière and Shawinigan. I invite my Bloc Québécois colleagues to speak out loud and clear on behalf of Quebecers, because 1,600 families from back home are probably watching today. There are 1,600 families in Shawinigan and 5,500 Quebecers who expect my colleagues to stand up for them in the House.

If my Bloc Québécois and NDP colleagues do not, we will stand up for them because we, the 40 Liberal members, have a strong voice in this place. The seven ministers will be there and the Prime Minister will be there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Some of my colleagues may laugh, but I can say that, if they had been in the chamber yesterday, they would have seen the 1,600 workers laugh at them, because they understood that the truth is that what we need is people who will fight to keep jobs in the regions. I cannot imagine that in 2019 we cannot accommodate jobs in Quebec and modernize at the same time. We are able to do both. That is what we tell Quebecers: we will obviously work with them, but we will also give ourselves the means to succeed in the regions. We have the right to stand up for our families in the regions, who work hard for the Canada Revenue Agency.

I am emotional because, although those people do not have a seat in the House, they expect the members to defend Quebec in this place. I would invite my Conservative colleagues to talk to their leader and their colleagues to tell them that jobs in Quebec are important.

I cannot understand how an elected member from Quebec would not rise today to stand up for Quebec. In fact, that is the issue; it is a matter of occupying the territory, of defending the expertise that has

been developed in the regions and of defending employees who get up each morning to serve Canadians.

The Shawinigan National Verification and Collections Centre is the most bilingual centre in the country. It serves all Canadians all the way from Shawinigan. It is something to be proud of. I was in the chamber yesterday; 1,600 people rose and applauded for about a minute, thanking us for trusting them and believing in them.

We will certainly continue to stand up for them, because we believe that we are able to make things better. What we will be giving to Shawinigan is not just a larger building, but also a greener building that reflects just what Quebecers want. When we invest, we do so in a smart way, and that is why we have invested in a new building.

We made that commitment several years ago. In 2015, I was in the park just in front of the Shawinigan Tax Centre, along with former prime minister Chrétien. We stood up and we said that we would do everything we could to preserve the sustainability of the Shawinigan Tax Centre. In 2016, the Minister of National Revenue committed to transforming the Shawinigan Tax Centre into a National Verification and Collections Centre, and we made that happen yesterday by saying that we would provide them with office space and a 21st century building.

We want the Shawinigan Tax Centre to be there for future generations. I think that we will show everyone in the Mauricie region, Quebec and Canada that it is a jewel and that those jobs in the region make an enormous difference.

I hope that my colleagues, including my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, will stand tall and proud to defend Quebec. It is not about politics. It is about families. We will certainly not play politics at the expense of families. We are here to stand up for them. The people of Quebec sent us to Ottawa so we could stand up for them, along with our Bloc Québécois colleagues.

• (1555)

We must protect these jobs in Quebec. We are able to harmonize and modernize things and work with Quebec, while respecting the families who depend on these jobs in the regions. On this side of the House, we will always find a member or minister who is proud to speak about their region and also to stand up for the workers in Jonquière.

Yesterday, we were proud to reaffirm our plan to remain an employer of choice in the Mauricie by announcing a major investment in the region. As I said yesterday, the heroes of the story are the 1,600 workers who are there. Thanks to their hard work and expertise, together we have ensured the continued viability of the Shawinigan tax centre. I told them that I wanted to applaud them and to thank them, because it is because of them that we have come this far and can invest in the future with them.

I really hope that both sides of the House will come to the conclusion that our commitment to harmonization and modernization is the right choice, but that we must also preserve Quebec's assets. I do not understand the members who are not proud to represent a riding where there are federal jobs and to defend our regions. I see some of them in the House.

It is in Quebec that this is happening. There are 5,500 good jobs in Quebec. Members of the Conservative Party, like the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, say that there will be no job losses. I do not know how many taxation centres he has managed in his lifetime, but the directors of the taxation centres, the union and the Premier of Quebec all tell us that this could result in job losses. It is 2019 and we can do better. We can harmonize things and simplify life for Quebeckers, but we can also keep jobs at home.

We are talking about Quebec. It goes without saying that Quebec members stand up for Quebec. We can do it. Let us look to the future together and make life easier for Quebeckers. With today's technology, anything is possible. However, this should certainly not be done at the expense of families. I appeal to the common sense of my colleagues, because I know that they are good people.

I know we are talking about numbers today but yesterday, when I was in the House, I saw 1,600 faces. They are people I meet at IGA, at Jean Coutu or at Shell. They thank me for standing up for them and for their jobs, and for saying that we can make good use of the excellent work they do in their region. That is what they expect of Quebec MPs. They expect them to be proud leaders carrying the torch, not people who will sacrifice jobs to win an election.

I encourage my colleague to meet union officials and to talk to tax centre employees. They will tell her what is going to happen.

We must all rally on this issue. Common sense must prevail in the House of Commons. We have to understand that we can do better together. I cannot see why some prefer confrontation instead of looking for solutions when the issue is jobs and families. We are not talking about only 5,500 people, but 5,500 families. That is a lot of people.

I encourage Conservative members to visit my riding and see what kind of reception they get. Let them tell the families they meet that there is no cause for concern. These families have been living in fear for 10 years. They are the reason why we spoke loud and clear yesterday. They are the reason why the Prime Minister spoke today. We stand up for Quebeckers and we have great ambitions for regions.

At least, our colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and the NDP have the courage of their convictions. They stood up and spoke for regions. They are convinced that we can do better. I salute these members because, after a moment of hesitation, they came to their senses. I know that our other colleagues will also come to theirs, because nobody wants to put jobs at risk. No member in this House was elected to put jobs at risk.

•(1600)

I do not think anyone watching at home would have thought that their vote would help send someone to the House of Commons to put their job at risk. I am standing up for these 1,600 families in Mauricie who rely on their jobs at the tax centre. What I saw yesterday was pride. I will continue to repeat this, since it is important to talk about them.

On one side of the House they speak in conceptual terms, but I prefer to speak in real terms. These are human beings, and when we are talking about human beings, we have to tell their stories. We have to talk about the 40 years of knowledge that has been

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developed in Mauricie. That is why we need to take the time to talk about it.

I think the Conservatives are on the wrong track, but Quebeckers know this. Quebeckers will remember. They have a long memory. When people put their jobs at risk, they know how to respond. They will remember, and we will make sure to remind them. Who voted to put their jobs at risk? Who voted against tax cuts? Who opposed modernizing our country's tax framework?

I believe that, today, we must ask ourselves one question: can we do better? When we ask this question, the answer readily appears. Yes, we can do better. What I would like is for the men and women in this place, in the House, to find a solution around harmonization rather than job losses.

Let us stop playing politics at the expense of Quebec regions. Let us continue to believe that we can do a good job and set aside politics when it is in the best interest of families and the people we represent. I know that each one of us can do that.

I will close by saying that there are moments in history when people are judged for their actions and their words and for everything they decide to do for Quebec. I believe that this is one of those moments and people will remember this for a long time. Let us not jeopardize valuable jobs in our regions. Let us instead use the expertise that has been developed and continue to have ambitions for our regions.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): What a beautiful, moving speech, Mr. Speaker.

The member talked about not playing politics at people's expense, and I totally agree with him, but announcing the construction of a wonderful new building in Shawinigan is kind of political. The building will be built in 2024, so the member cannot deny that is a political move. Let's be honest: we are all politicians.

Why is the Liberal Party once again ignoring the people of Quebec and the National Assembly, which unanimously adopted a motion? Why do the Liberals not even want to listen to them? They are slamming the door, but those of us on this side of the House are saying we should talk to the Premier of Quebec. This is a perfect opportunity to do something good for Quebec.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, for whom I have a great deal of respect, for allowing me to say that yes, we must work with the Premier of Quebec to see what can be done.

I want to come back to the building that was announced yesterday. It is a new building, 20,000 square meters, to accommodate the needs established by the Canada Revenue Agency. The current building is 17,000 square meters.

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As for the timeline, we will be launching a bidding process in the coming weeks for the design, geotechnical studies, and environmental studies. The bidding process for the builder will be launched in 2021. Construction will begin in 2022 and will be completed in 2024. The reason it will take so long is because we chose to have one of the most modern and greenest buildings in the country. Yesterday we told employees that at the very least the building would meet LEED certification standards. In other words, the building will be the envy of public servants across the country. It will be the most technologically advanced and one of the greenest buildings in Canada. All these stages take time.

When we build something today, we build it for the 21st century. People expect us to build green, modern buildings that are on the cutting edge of technology. That is what we promised the tax centre employees we would do yesterday.

● (1605)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain for his speech.

Obviously, he can count me as an ally when it comes to defending jobs at the tax centre in Shawinigan, since about half of the employees there are probably residents of Trois-Rivières.

Where I really have a problem, however, is when they say they are not going to play politics with this. That is why we are here. Politics is all about finding the best way forward. What we have here is a Conservative Party that seems to live in a magical land of unicorns and a Liberal Party that seems to live in a land of denial. During the previous Parliament, before my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain was even elected, I was already defending the Shawinigan tax centre. Why is this investment coming so late when, during the campaign in 2015, he and I had proposed more or less the same thing to workers in that sector? This proposal is coming so late in the term that it could only be implemented in the Liberal government's hypothetical second term. That is what I would take issue with today.

Quebec's request is a legitimate one. Can we find a way to respond without saying either that it can easily be done without any job losses, or that it is impossible? The difference is that the NDP has decided that no jobs will be cut and that a way forward will involve the major unions, which protect workers. We can find a way forward. It may take longer to come up with than the solution that my party's supporters decided on or imagined when they introduced a resolution at a convention. However, this does not mean that we stop considering the possibilities the following day.

When will we be able to follow up on this request by the Government of Quebec and find a way forward? I believe that the NDP, which is willing to sit down with all interested parties, is offering the best possible solutions.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières. Obviously, people will listen to him.

Anything is possible. I find it interesting to hear the NDP talk about unions. I met with the president of the national union yesterday. Union representatives Normand Pelletier and Michèle Lafond thanked us and told us that, for once, someone was speaking on their behalf. What I can say is that we have put politics

completely aside. My colleague from Trois-Rivières knows that. Infrastructure projects are a long time in the making.

I am pleased that the member for Trois-Rivières is rising because approximately 800 people in his riding must be watching us with great interest. We should be rising to keep those jobs. I have said it in front of the cameras: we are all for harmonizing, coordinating and modernizing. Obviously, we want to reduce the burden on Quebec taxpayers. However, with regard to the deadline, it is going to take some time to build one of the greenest buildings in the country. I cannot imagine that the NDP would be against that. As we said, we will consult the employees. There is a deadline. We said that we would hold a bidding process in the coming weeks. Geotechnical, environmental and design studies will be conducted. Work will begin right after that with the selection of a contractor in 2021. Construction will start in 2022 and be completed in 2024.

The train has already left the station. We cannot go back. The employees are the ones who deserve congratulations, not the politicians. We should congratulate the employees who stood up. They are the ones who will help keep this project going. The government has decided, and this is why we are launching a bidding process in the coming weeks. We want to make sure that this gets done.

I realize that we need to put an end to the uncertainty that has been created. I hope that no one else will rise in the House to undermine jobs in our regions. Our survival depends on them.

● (1610)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear my colleague, the minister, defend his point of view so fervently and passionately. Obviously, everyone knows he is a man of great talent and ambition, with many fine qualities. I will give him credit for that, but not for anything else.

He said repeatedly that he does not want to play politics on the backs of families, workers and Quebeckers, yet that is exactly what he did. Throughout his speech, he kept giving the impression that Conservatives want to kill jobs in Quebec. That is completely false, and he knows it.

Let me refresh his memory, while also speaking to the 1,600 workers in Shawinigan. On January 22, 2019, regarding the CRA employees, the Leader of the Opposition, the prime minister in waiting, the man we really hope becomes the next prime minister, made it very clear that eliminating public service jobs is out of the question for us, that these employees are going to tackle tax evasion, which is even better for taxpayers, and that we need these public servants to ensure compliance with federal laws.

That is what the Conservative Party leader said during our announcement two and a half weeks ago on January 22. The minister knows that and implied that he did not say those things. Why the political hypocrisy?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, whom I very much respect. We cross paths often.

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I am sure everyone will understand why I would ignore what the Conservative leader says in favour of what the Premier of Quebec said about this approach potentially causing job losses in Quebec.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It has nothing to do with him, for crying out loud. It is none of his business.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: With all due respect, I am going to rely less on the Conservative leader, who has never been to Shawinigan, and more on the person in charge of the tax centre, the union president and the people who work there. They tell me the Conservatives' proposal is unthinkable because it would result in job losses.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: So now you trust François Legault?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Let me make this clear: no Quebecker should stand up in the House to say things that could jeopardize good jobs in the regions.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It is exactly the opposite, and you know it.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Personally, I have high hopes for the regions, and I hope all the other MPs do too. I am not saying every proposal would have that effect. I am saying we should not even say things that could jeopardize those kinds of jobs in the regions because every job is precious and represents a family, people we have met. The Conservative leader may have said that, but I invite him to go meet the people who work at the centre. He would get a somewhat different response.

Canadians will soon have their say.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I want to remind members that according to the Standing Orders, at least as I understand them, one person asks a question and another one responds. Members must not yell at the person who is responding, nor at the person who is asking the question. This is just a reminder for all members who are in the House today, in case they have forgotten.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beauport—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beauport—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate. I will be splitting my time with my colleague for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Let me be perfectly clear that this will be a political speech. I make no excuses for that. I am a politician first and foremost. I am the only female Conservative member from Quebec, and I care deeply about my region and all regions.

I find it deplorable that the Liberal Party is launching a fearmongering campaign aimed not at politicians, but at workers. Liberals need not worry. Our leader will go talk to the workers. He has a message for them. In 2006, here in this House, we voted unanimously for Prime Minister Harper to recognize the Quebec nation. There were 266 votes for the motion and 15 votes against, all from Liberal members. That was peculiar. I do not understand. Where were the Liberals when the time came to vote for the Quebec nation?

Here is the resolution from Quebec's National Assembly, which was also passed unanimously:

THAT the National Assembly ask the Government of Québec and the Federal Government to implement a single tax report for Québec taxpayers, to be filed with Revenu Québec, while preserving Québec's fiscal autonomy.

Once we have read that, it is time for action. We care about the people of Quebec, and I will never stand idly by while a Quebec MP from any party, especially the Liberal Party, ostentatiously claims we are not standing up for Quebec. We have always stood up for Quebec. There are 12 Conservative MPs from Quebec, and all of our voices can be heard in that province. The same cannot be said of the Liberals right now. We can hear the ministers, but the MPs from Quebec are practically silent.

When Quebec needed help, we were there almost every time. It is important to understand that we have room to manoeuvre in this day and age. We are entering a new era. It is 2019, and we will act accordingly. It is important that the House show profound respect for provincial jurisdiction and great confidence in provincial institutions. However, there is a paternalistic party on the other side that encroaches on provincial jurisdiction at will. On our side, we allow provinces to have more freedom, since we recognize that each one is different and has its own way of seeing things. It is important to say so. In Quebec, we want to cut the red tape. We have to file two tax returns, while people in all the other provinces only have to file one.

• (1615)

Quebec has long been asking to be allowed to do things its own way. Over the years, each federal party in power gave us a little more leeway. Today, we are asking for the same thing. Quebeckers are asking us for it, and the National Assembly is unanimously asking us for it. In our respective ridings, there are a lot of people paying attention to this issue.

There has been some fearmongering over job losses, but that is not going to come true. Jobs can be created in different ways. For some time now, there has been a lot of talk about tax evasion. Now may be the time to get these people working to fight tax evasion. This may be the perfect time to focus on it and come up with alternatives so that all these fine people get to keep working for years to come.

Over the past few months, my colleagues, our leader and I have gone out to meet Quebeckers and hear about their thoughts and ideas. We have criss-crossed Quebec many times over. We have all been listening to Quebeckers. Every time we met Quebeckers, we talked with them. We sat down to listen to them, to take notes and to talk. That is what a frank discussion is all about.

What we are asking all parties to do is to keep an open mind, listen to what Quebec wants, and then sit down with Quebeckers to figure out exactly how the single tax return will work. That is what Quebec is asking us to do. The Liberal Party of Quebec supported the idea before, and the CAQ supports it today. The Quebec parties unanimously agree. All this politicking is needless. They did not all get this idea out of a Cracker Jack box. Everyone agrees with it.

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The Liberals are raising the spectre of job losses, but they need to stop. That kind of scare tactic should not be used in 2019, because jobs are needed everywhere. There will not be any job losses. At this point in time, we can look at what can be improved and how it can be improved in order to make sure all these fine people are aware of the change. There will be changes, because there will be a single tax return.

I will always stand up for Quebec. I will always be proud to be a Quebecker. I will always be proud of my home. I will always be proud to say “present” whenever Quebec needs something.

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the projects that interested me for quite some time was, of course, energy east, and I know her party supports energy east. If Quebeckers come out and say they do not want pipelines through their backyards, as the expression goes, would she fight against energy east?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We are going to listen to what Quebeckers want. We are going to improve how things are done. There is no denying that Quebeckers are heavy oil users.

What I am saying today is that we are going to work to ensure a single tax return. For the rest, we will have discussions with the Premier of Quebec, all Quebeckers and people in eastern Canada, since they want it too.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has asked an excellent question. The truth is that the Conservatives choose unanimous motions from the National Assembly when it suits them. If the unanimous motions do not suit their purposes, they do not get up here in the House to say that they are defending Quebec and its interests and explain how the Conservatives are always there for Quebec. The Conservatives are only there when it suits them and when the unanimous motions are consistent with their Conservative ideology. That was true of the previous Conservative government, and it is true today. When it does not suit them, they are not on the side of the majority of Quebeckers, as with the energy east issue.

My question concerns the fact that the member seems to be putting the cart before the horse. She says that she wants to adopt this motion today and then start discussions to come up with the ideal solution to make life easier for Quebeckers and protect jobs. She should have done that first, like the NDP did.

The NDP has taken a serious, credible and responsible approach. We realized that, under the current circumstances, this is not possible. Jobs are at stake. We are talking about 5,500 jobs. When it was announced that 2,500 or 2,600 jobs would be lost at GM, the House unanimously condemned that decision. Today, we are talking about 5,500 jobs. When it comes to the federal public service, it seems like the Conservatives do not care about jobs.

What does my colleague have to say about the concern that these workers have and the fact that she is putting the cart before the horse and did not do her homework before introducing this motion?

• (1625)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, not only did we do our homework, but we also listened to Quebeckers and went to meet with them.

Unlike the NDP, we have not changed our minds three times. We looked at both sides. We met with everyone. We travelled across Quebec with our leader. It is easy for the NDP to say that the Conservatives are this or that. You have changed your minds three times. We know that you did this because the unions told you to. Otherwise, you would have been the first to vote for this.

Everyone needs to be involved in the discussion. With a bill like this, Quebec needs to be involved, and everyone here needs to be part of the discussion. We will do this, because this is what we have always done. When we move motions and introduce bills, we sit down with people to talk about them. That is how we show respect for democracy and for the Premier of Quebec.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I assure the member that I have not changed my mind. I am sure she was talking about the member for Sherbrooke.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what an emotional day this has been. It is a day when Quebec is in the spotlight, and that comes with a lot of emotion.

I would like to calm things down a bit and get back to the facts. We are here today debating a motion moved by my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska. This motion was not drafted just for fun. It was tabled following some very real events for us.

First, as my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix said, we remember Stephen Harper. My colleagues opposite love to try to destroy what he did, but he did one important thing for Quebeckers in 2006, which was to get the House of Commons to recognize Quebec as a nation.

Over the past year and a half, we have been wondering what Quebeckers now expect from a motion like that one. My 10 Conservative colleagues from Quebec and I have toured Quebec. We went everywhere, all the way to northern Abitibi and to the North Shore. We went to listen to Quebeckers. We told them that we recognized Quebec as a nation in 2006 and that we wanted to know what that meant for them now. The tax return issue was one of the major points that kept coming up.

Again, this is not about emotion, but about administration. It is about paperwork. There is nothing emotional about that. The emotion that we are feeling is only anger at having to fill out tax returns.

Business of Supply

When we came back from our tour, we thought that it was clear. We did not invent anything. We just listened to Quebeckers. Around the same time, the Quebec National Assembly decided to turn it into a unanimous resolution, adopted by all members of the National Assembly, regardless of party. Members on the left and right all said that they wanted this. Again, this is rational. Let us take a deep breath.

By listening to Quebeckers, our leader, who is very interested in learning what Quebec really wants, said that as prime minister, he would ensure that the Conservative government negotiates with Quebec and finds a way to do it. It is still a matter of administration.

The motion moved by my colleague today seeks to create a relationship of trust with the provinces, to listen to our provinces so that we can work well with them. We are prepared to say that we will work effectively with the Government of Quebec on establishing guidelines for administering a single tax return.

What is so emotional about all of this?

It is simple. We are being asked about jobs. Of course there are challenges any time a measure is introduced. Any measure or any important political decision will always involve considerations related to jobs, expenditures and revenues, depending on what is being done. That is to be expected.

The basic principle that is driving us today, the purpose of our motion, is the fact that there are 8 million Quebeckers. That is a lot of people, one-quarter of Canada's population, who have to fill out two tax returns. We merely want to simplify things. We will manage the impact that this will have on jobs. We will figure out how to handle it. The leader of the Conservative Party has already said that we would manage the situation appropriately. Some federal employees may be assigned to different tasks or have to deal with restructuring. That is for sure. Such a big decision is bound to have consequences. However, we are all aware of that and we want those people to keep their jobs.

How will it work? That remains to be seen.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I can hear the New Democrats shouting, but does anyone really believe that, deep down, we would want to make a decision like that to eliminate jobs? Come on. That is why today's debate has become so emotionally charged. That is why members are trying to attack us, to the turn the debate around and make it political. I cannot count on the NDP because it has changed its mind two or three times. Can I count on the Liberal government and the Prime Minister who refuse every time Quebec asks for something?

• (1630)

We all remember Premier Couillard. Quebec drafted a document to reopen certain constitutional issues. It was very complex work. Mr. Couillard very calmly and dispassionately said he would just like to talk about the issues. The Prime Minister looked at reporters and said he had no intention of talking. That is how this government operates: emotionally. Reactions like that from the Prime Minister and his government drive me up the wall. I cannot stand seeing 40 Liberal MPs from Quebec not give a damn about what

Quebeckers think. As I Quebecker, I just do not get it. If they want me to get mad, I will get mad. Every time a Quebec issue comes up, the government reacts negatively.

I am just asking members of the House to be open to discussion. There are steps that need to be taken, of course, and there are ways to do that if we behave like grown men and women, but that is not at all what I have seen today.

Let us look at the answers given by Quebec premiers. Obviously, Mr. Couillard supported the motion. The National Assembly motion was passed by the provincial Liberals of the day. Now the CAQ and Premier Legault are in power, and it is the same thing, of course. Our motion builds on the work already begun in response to Quebec's demands. The Government of Quebec and the National Assembly know Quebeckers better than anyone. We went out to listen to Quebeckers first-hand, and so we are in a position to confirm Quebec's wishes.

It is also important to point out that all members of the Conservative Party support this initiative. It is not only the 11 members from Quebec who are rising to speak to this matter. The entire Conservative caucus supports this initiative to help Quebeckers. At the Conservative Party convention in Halifax last August, the 3,000 delegates in attendance voted over 99% in favour of the motion for a single tax return in Quebec.

Let us stop being emotional and let us be rational. Jobs are important, but we can manage the situation and, basically, there are eight million Quebeckers who are expecting not to have to fill out two tax returns any more, just like all other Canadians, who only file one.

• (1635)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand. Across the way we have a party that wants to cause upheaval and disruptions that affect real people, individuals and their families, and create uncertainty and anxiety. What is their end game?

As the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges said, thanks to technology, Quebeckers can file their tax returns with software that does all the work. It is not like it used to be when we had to fill out two returns with a pencil and flip through one pile of paper to another.

Why does the party across the way want to cause upheaval to end up getting what we are already equipped to do, in other words, use software to do our taxes?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis for the question. I would simply say that we listened to Quebeckers. Maybe that does not happen in his riding or maybe the people there do not talk about it, but people across Quebec were unanimous.

We truly listened to Quebeckers. We did not get into unnecessary consultations. We held round tables and people were unanimous. What is more, the National Assembly held two votes on this, once under the previous government and once under the current government. If my colleague consulted his constituent and asked them the question, he would get the same response.

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Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, but I cannot help but draw a comparison between the new Conservative and new wine. Often, the packaging is attractive. As for taste, I will let everyone make up their own mind, but I will just say that mine is pretty much set. Let us go back to the facts; when I hear my colleague talk about this co-operation that we should have, I wonder why we cannot achieve it.

Since the beginning of this conversation today, we have heard the Conservatives tell us ad nauseam that there will not be any job losses. The member for Mégantic—L'Érable repeated it at least 15 times. However, the Conservatives rejected our amendment to specifically add that to the motion they introduced.

Can they not include in their motion that we will implement this idea while guaranteeing no job losses? Why do they not agree to put in writing what they have been telling us in the House right from the start?

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

The NDP agreed that Quebec should have a single tax return. Unfortunately, under pressure from the unions, the leader of the NDP decided to change his mind and refuse this request. We cannot play that game. Our position is clear. We know where we are going, we know what we want, and we know what Quebecers want. Our Conservative colleagues agree.

I cannot change everything I have to do here because the NDP has internal communication problems about its position. I cannot ask my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska to change his motion because the leader of the NDP has a position opposite of that of the NDP members from Quebec.

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are debating a proposal that would benefit all Quebecers. We have repeated ad nauseam that Quebec's National Assembly reached a unanimous consensus. There are 78 Quebec MPs from all parties, who represent voters of every stripe and from every walk of life. In the last election, they voted in favour of a proposal to file a single tax return.

Maybe my colleague could help me with something I am wondering about. How can certain parties, especially the Liberal Party and the NDP, not be willing to uphold the unanimous consensus of our voters and our provincial counterparts in Quebec City?

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

That is exactly what I was saying earlier. We did the work on the ground. We met with people across Quebec. The 40 Liberal MPs from Quebec are missing in action. Their excessive, negative reactions today prove that they are completely out of touch with the reality of Quebecers.

• (1640)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver East, Indigenous Affairs;

the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Justice; the hon. member for Saskatoon West, Asbestos.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to inform you that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Jonquière. She is very familiar with this issue and is very involved in finding practical solutions for the people of her region, for workers, but also for all Quebec taxpayers.

We are having a very interesting discussion today, because we are seeing some rather extreme and sweeping positions. It smacks of improvisation, while in the NDP, we have a clear position, but it is nuanced because it is well thought out and because we have worked on the issue. We did not just toss a balloon into the air to see whether it would fly.

Let me recap. The last federal NDP convention in Montreal was attended by 3,000 delegates from across the country. Part of the discussions and resolutions considered during the convention dealt with the single tax return. This resolution, which came from Quebec, of course, had two parts. The first was to recognize that it is somewhat incongruous for Quebecers to be the only taxpayers in the country who have to file two tax returns, while all the others in the federation file only one. Is having a single tax return for Quebec a good idea? A vast majority of the delegates supported the resolution and its principle. It certainly would make people's lives easier.

There is a second part to this resolution, which is that we must avoid shooting ourselves in the foot as we attempt to help each other out. We want to make this change, but we do not want to hurt people by doing so. More than 5,000 people in Quebec work for the Canada Revenue Agency. They process the tax returns not just of Quebecers, but also of people from other provinces. They also perform other tasks related to the tax activities of taxpayers across the country.

The NDP's resolution is very clear. The NDP supports the idea of a single tax return, but that approach would need to be implemented in a way that respects workers and ensures that they keep their jobs. We are talking about good jobs and people who are working in the regions, mainly in Mauricie. My colleague from Trois-Rivières is obviously very aware of that. Some of those workers are also located in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area.

We adopted the resolution and then we got to work. We went and met with the representatives of the employees who work in this field day after day and year after year. We asked them if it would be possible to come up with a plan to reassign people to different tasks, to additional or different activities. When one starts looking at the details, it is more complicated than it seems for various reasons.

There is a lot of seasonal work and student jobs. There are people who process tax returns for a living but who could not necessarily be reassigned to technical or specialized tasks related to the fight against tax havens or tax evasion. The NDP supports the fight against tax evasion. We are not against it, quite the contrary. That was our pet cause in the Quebec caucus throughout 2017. However, it is not true that someone who does a certain job can be transferred to a completely different one the next day. That is rather unrealistic.

Business of Supply

The leader of the Conservative Party is saying that it is simple and that those who are working on tax returns today can be transferred to work on tax evasion tomorrow. This is proof that the Conservatives did not do their homework, that they did not talk to people on the ground, that they did not look into what is actually possible.

An hon. member: They are amateurs.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It is indeed amateur hour, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned improvisation earlier but this is completely amateurish. I was really shocked to hear the Conservative member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord this morning. Following his speech, he was asked how he would ensure that there would be no job losses and what exactly these people would do for work. The member replied that these were details. We are talking about the lives of 5,000 people and decent incomes for these families and for the regions.

• (1645)

With those jobs comes a great deal of economic development, not to mention increased purchasing power in regions with many SMEs, including restaurants and other businesses.

We need to take a serious approach. We have to approach the task as professionally as possible, and that is exactly what the NDP has done, by holding several meetings. We have done things reasonably and diligently, as we must when we respect people. We respect workers. From the outset, we said that this was what we wanted to do.

The principle is good, attractive even, and easy to understand. However, there are significant regional and socio-economic impacts for families. We are being told that the NDP members are not listening to the people of Quebec. However, the 5,500 workers are 5,500 Quebeckers we sat with and listened to. I will claim loudly and proudly that my Quebec definitely includes the FTQ, which represents 600,000 people. It is the largest civil society organization in Quebec right now. These are people with whom we have a relationship and with whom we can sit down to see what practical solutions we can come up with. That is what we have done and what, unfortunately, other political parties, such as the Conservatives, have not.

They are so unwilling to truly commit themselves that I want to remind everyone about what happened this morning. The member for Sherbrooke said that the Conservative motion as drafted contained certain potentially interesting elements, but that it was missing one big thing. That big thing is the second component of the resolution adopted at the NDP convention, namely a guarantee that these people will not suffer or lose their jobs in the regions.

The member for Sherbrooke therefore presented a very simple amendment saying that the implementation of the single tax return must not result in a loss of employment within the public service. Shockingly, this amendment was rejected. The Conservative Party turned it down, even though the Conservative members said over and over, in all of their speeches and questions today in the House, that no jobs would be lost. When the time came to put it in writing, however, they said no. They said that it was a mere detail and that they would think about how to do this.

We cannot trust a party that spent 10 years slashing public services and cutting social programs when they were in government under

Stephen Harper. We cannot trust them or tell them that the details will be taken care of later. That is not how things work.

We might one day be open to a plan for a single tax return if it did not involve job losses and if services were being provided to the public and were perhaps improved. That is what we are saying. It is not complicated.

We can find ways to make life easier for people. In many countries, tax returns are filled out in advance. People must check to make sure that their income and deductions match, since tax returns are relatively simple for a large number of people who have a set salary. A number of OECD countries operate like this, and we could consider this solution or possibility as a way to make things easier for Quebeckers and Canadians.

However, that is not on the table for right now. I think it is unfortunate that political parties are so quick to get carried away with rhetoric and theatrics. This is easy to do when members are not out there themselves, looking into these things.

It would be a good idea to put more effort and energy into fighting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. However, the Liberal government must first take this seriously and invest the necessary resources. Since coming to power, the Liberals have not convicted any millionaires for hiding millions in the Cayman Islands or Barbados. The Liberals have no credibility. They have signed new agreements with tax havens.

If they want to tackle tax evasion, we will support them. However, they have not yet done so. Neither did the Conservatives for 10 years. Neither of these parties have any credibility in this file.

• (1650)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I surprise myself, but I have to admit that I agree with the hon. member across the way.

It is easy to say that we will merge structures and that it will be as easy as pie, but it is never like that in reality. The Conservatives' plan seems to have been scribbled down on a napkin in the opposition lobby during a brainstorming session on how to get more votes in Quebec.

It is very hard to merge structures. In the private sector, such attempts often fail. It can be even harder in the public sector. Often, there are two pay scales, and there needs to be agreement on which one to choose. There is always a group that is unhappy with the results and decides to leave. Then we end up short-staffed on the administration side, which can affect the service being provided. When dealing with taxes, we cannot afford to have inadequate service. That can lead to total economic chaos.

I agree with the hon. member. My question is rather simple and I asked it earlier. We all have access to software to fill out a single form and insert data into a computer. We can print two returns and send one to the province and one to the federal government.

What do we have to gain under this plan? I do not get it.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague.

Business of Supply

I look back fondly on the work we did together on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, but that is a whole other story.

I think this shows the NDP's prudent and responsible approach towards thousands of people, their families and regional economies.

I really like the more specific point he raises about all the software that is widely available. Once a person completes their tax return on the computer, which they only have to do once, they can file two copies electronically, by email. Many people already do their taxes that way. My office offers a tax filing workshop to my riding's least fortunate residents. I volunteer for that workshop, along with other people and my staff. That is the method we use to help people who have trouble reading and need a hand with filing taxes.

I think that is a fairly simple example that demonstrates that the technology is more advanced than certain political claims taken from a focus group.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his speech and for reminding us of the NDP's responsible approach to this issue.

Compared to the Conservatives' approach of jumping on any opportunity to cut the public service, and the Liberals' approach of shutting the door and refusing to find solutions with those involved, the NDP's approach is responsible.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts and put this into perspective.

A total of 5,500 jobs represents a lot of people. This will also have a significant impact on the economy. Our thoughts are with the families in Oshawa affected by job losses there. The Oshawa community is losing 2,600 jobs.

Could my colleague tell us what these 5,500 jobs—more than double that other number—represent to communities like Jonquière and Shawinigan? All members agree that that was bad news out of Oshawa. Would it also be bad news for the regions of Jonquière and Shawinigan if the Conservatives were to do as planned and implement their austerity 2.0 plan overnight and cut 5,500 jobs?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sherbrooke for his excellent question.

Let us remember that workers are the foundation of the NDP. We are the party of labour. We are also the party of public services. We will always take great care to respect people and provide them with the best jobs possible, and not cause them to lose their jobs. That is what is most important.

That is why we are fighting for auto sector workers. That is why we are fighting for Davie shipyard and to get back the hundreds of jobs that were lost. That is why we rise in the House to defend workers in the aluminum and forestry sectors. That is why we are in politics. Our colleagues introduce bills to protect workers' pensions so the money is not stolen as was the case with Sears workers. That is why we are here and we are proud of it.

• (1655)

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there has been a tax centre in my riding of Jonquière since 1983. More than 1,000 people currently work at this centre. There are full-time and

temporary workers. We must remember that the majority of these people are the breadwinners in their families.

I would like to thank all my colleagues from the Quebec NDP caucus. We worked together and did excellent research to support the resolution adopted at our last convention. Our objective was to determine, following discussions with unions and workers, whether a single tax return could be introduced without causing job losses. The idea itself may be commendable, because people in other provinces file a single tax return.

The most difficult task was determining what would happen to the 5,500 people working in Jonquière, Shawinigan or the tax services office in Chicoutimi if a single tax return were implemented. That is a considerable number of jobs. The NDP was the first party to consider the future of the workers. It is an important issue that affects many people.

It is all well and good to throw out ideas and proposals. We are people with strong opinions, which is commendable, but we need to do the research and meet with the people who will be affected so that we can understand the importance of their work and what they do. In this specific case, we would have to visit the Jonquière Tax Centre, which I have visited three times, or the tax services office in Chicoutimi, which I have also been to several times. That is why the NDP reconsidered this idea. When we put the workers first, we hit a wall. What will happen to their jobs?

I will come back to Jonquière, which is home to 1,000 employees. These are men and women with families to support. Furthermore, these people keep our economy going. The jobs in Jonquière, including all salary levels, represent a total payroll of \$40 million for the Saguenay region. That is quite a lot of money.

In my region, we always want to foster development, offer good working conditions and create high-quality jobs. There are problems with housing. People are having trouble finding a place to live. The solution to this problem involves providing good jobs, like the jobs at the Jonquière Tax Centre and the Shawinigan National Verification and Collections Centre. These jobs help improve families' quality of life.

This proposal is creating concern among the workers. I have had a chance to follow the debates today, especially the comments made by Conservative members. They do not appear to be very concerned about these hard-working people. It is true that no one likes paying taxes. However, when we see the quality of the service provided, especially in Quebec, we understand that the successful growth of our beautiful country and, if I may say so myself, my beautiful province depends on this common good and our collective strength. At no point today did I hear the Conservatives show any regard for the workers' concerns. I want to emphasize that, because the Conservatives have been calling us every name in the book all day long.

Business of Supply

•(1700)

I met a father of four on Sunday. He told me he is the main breadwinner and that he is worried and very anxious. With the election approaching, people are wondering if politicians will care about them. That is what he told me. He has worked at the Jonquière tax centre for 15 years, and he is wondering if he will still have work next year or two years from now. What is going to happen to him?

Today's motion is not making people feel optimistic. There is no real plan, no proposal for working together, and that worries people.

As parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to care about people. We have had many debates in the House of Commons. Earlier, a member talked about GM workers in Oshawa who have good jobs. The same holds true for workers in Quebec.

I am especially concerned for working families in my riding, Jonquière. I just mentioned the father I met with. He is worried. Hundreds of people are worried too. I hope everyone will listen to reason, and I hope the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois will eventually do the same work we did.

It is easy to say that no jobs will be lost and to repeat it 10, 15 or 20 times. It does not bode well if we cannot even put it in writing that workers have to be protected and that no loss of employment within the federal public service should occur, as my colleague for Sherbrooke asked for in his amendment this morning.

At some point, we have to walk the talk. Action must be taken. It is important. I will not hesitate to sign a document if I am truly and deeply convinced that it is the right thing to do.

The rejection of the amendment moved earlier today by my colleague for Sherbrooke to ensure that there would be no loss of employment for workers in Quebec, including in the tax centre in Jonquière, was a good example of that. Clearly, it does not make any sense.

Again, as parliamentarians, we have a responsibility. I believe we should review our tax system and improve the way we do things. There is a lot to do for SMEs. There is a lot of room for improvement. We still have a whole world to build. We have our entire future ahead of us.

It would be nice if Conservatives understood the importance of caring about workers. Words are not enough. We need action. We need a plan. As I was saying, the important thing is to work together and try to move in the direction Quebec wants, to communicate with the province and see where things can be improved. Opportunities do exist. One thing I can say for sure is that, as the member for Jonquière, I will always stand up for workers and defend their interests in the House and in my riding. Most importantly, I will make sure their jobs are protected.

I hope that the Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois and everyone in the House will listen to reason. We must make sure that no job is lost and that we are able to look for solutions. Partisanship is not the way to go. We cannot go into an election campaign making promises that we know we will not be able to keep. In particular, we must not try to balance the budget by cutting 5,500 jobs in Quebec. Even though that is a lot of jobs, it will not be enough for the Conservatives to

balance the budget, and I do not want that to be done on the backs of workers.

•(1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to a great deal of the debate today. Often debates such as this are very emotional.

I want to emphasize one of the underlying themes to which the members have referenced, and that is the workers. We should recognize that the Canada Revenue Agency employs thousands of people in the province of Quebec. It even goes beyond that province. These are professional civil servants who have done an outstanding job in providing top-quality service standards to all regions of the country, but in particular in the province of Quebec, which we are talking about today. There is an actual impact.

Does the member believe, as I do, that the Conservative Party has really underestimated the importance of those CRA jobs and the quality of the work employees perform for the people of Quebec, in fact all Canadians, either directly or indirectly?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention. We have had plenty of debates in the House, and I must admit that I agree with him to some extent, which is rare.

As we have seen today, some members are taking the job losses too lightly. They say it is no big deal. On the contrary, we need to take that very seriously. Any responsible party would have a very clear plan and know the right way to do things. As parliamentarians, it is not enough for us to simply make proposals. We need to do our homework and consult people on the ground, particularly the workers at the Jonquière and Shawinigan tax data centres. It is important to go there and see the kind of work they do. We can do more.

The government says not to worry, that it is going to dedicate all its resources to combatting tax havens. That is a great idea. We need to come up with programs for doing that, but we also need to put a structure in place. That requires training. Accountants are the ones who do that. Different methods are used to handle data on individuals and corporations, so different skills and training are required.

We need to think about improving services, particularly in Quebec, because that is a major problem. Many people come to see us because the Conservatives made so many cuts to public services. There is a way to continue to improve services, but we need to think about Quebec and those 5,500 jobs before saying any old thing.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not always agree with my friend from Winnipeg, but I do today. The tone with which the hon. member for Jonquière has defended her community and the jobs there and the way she has been constructive in her suggestions is really admirable. She is fighting for jobs in her community in the same way the member for Oshawa fought for jobs in his. However, this time the shoe seems to be on the other foot.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why she thinks the Bloc and the Conservatives are doing this today.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is clear that they did not do their homework. It is true that it is important for parliamentarians to communicate with the Quebec National Assembly. However, we sometimes need to take a step back.

As federal parliamentarians, we have the responsibility to do our job. I do not understand why the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives, who are pushing to implement this approach at any price, rejected the amendment that my colleague from Sherbrooke proposed today to try to ensure that there would not be any job losses. Their answer was a resounding no.

That clearly shows that they have not given any thought to what will happen next. They are not prepared. A party cannot just propose ideas without looking into the specifics. They need to come well prepared. It is disappointing to see two parties here in the House of Commons fearmongering. The 5,500 workers are worried, particularly those in my riding of Jonquière. They are worried that the tax centre will shut down. Those are good jobs, and I will do everything in my power to fight for those jobs and keep them in my community.

• (1710)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise at the end of this debate to conclude what was quite an eventful day. We were able to get to the bottom of the issue and determine who are the fearmongers in this House.

The question before us is, will Quebecers keep filing two tax returns? The official opposition believes that it is not a good idea and that Quebecers should file a single tax return. That is simple common sense. It is all about making life easier for Quebecers, making sure that they are no longer the only Canadians filing two tax returns, and implementing that change without any loss of employment.

Similar agreements already exist. Since 2011, there has been an excellent agreement in place that is based on the same principle, namely that the Government of Quebec collects the GST and delivers it directly to the federal government with not a single penny missing.

That is what is being proposed here, to allow Quebecers to file a single tax return like all other Canadians, along the lines of what is already being done with the GST, without sacrificing any jobs.

Why are Quebecers the only people in this country who have to submit two income tax returns?

Back on February 24, 1954, in what was then known as the legislative assembly, Premier Maurice Duplessis passed a bill to create an income tax return for the province of Quebec.

Some may wonder why he did that.

War being what it is, urgent measures were needed, and the Canadian government appropriated certain taxation powers. After the war, things should have gone back to the way they had been, but that did not happen. The Right Honourable Louis Saint-Laurent—although I do not know the man, I say his name every day as the MP for the riding that bears it—recognized that Quebec had the right and the power to create its own income tax return.

Historians agree that, in the 1960s, Quebec's taxation power made it possible for the Hon. Jean Lesage's government to introduce all its new measures during a period later known to many as the Quiet Revolution.

Over the years, the issue has surfaced a few times at the provincial and federal levels. We wondered if it might be a good idea for Quebecers to be able to file a single tax return, just like every other Canadian. The issue came up occasionally at the federal level, and the least we can say is that there was not much interest in the proposal. The issue was brought up in Quebec on a few occasions, if I recall correctly, by a federalist party. A party that wanted Quebec to remain in Canada proposed a single tax return in 1988. That was Action démocratique du Québec, a party that I obviously know very well.

This idea surfaced year in and year out, but not in a very concrete or well-formed way, and it was not very realistic or doable. With all due respect to those involved, it takes two to tango. There had to be a proponent in Quebec and a proponent in Ottawa. As there was not much enthusiasm for this initiative in Ottawa, there was not a lot of dancing going on.

Things just stumbled along. Just over a year later, we Conservatives floated the idea again during a meeting that we had with our leader, the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle and leader of the official opposition. Like many Canadians, he knew that Quebecers were the only ones to file two tax returns. He wondered if there was a way to change that. That is when we the Conservative members from Quebec did our homework to see whether there was any interest in this and whether it could be actually done.

We started the process. We debated the idea within the party. There were consultations across Quebec. There were results after the first phase, because this does not happen overnight. The first phase was done on May 12, 2018, when our party adopted the resolution during our provincial convention. All federal Conservative Party members were gathered in Saint-Hyacinthe. Nearly 500 people were there. No one will remember that the former leader of the Bloc Québécois decided to rejoin our party. No one will remember that the current mayor of Trois-Rivières decided to join our party. Many will remember that the convention was a resounding success.

Business of Supply

•(1715)

It was at that time—without wanting to dwell too much on local party matters—that Charles Plamondon, the Conservative Party riding association president for Louis-Saint-Laurent, took the microphone and we put this matter to a vote. It passed with a very clear majority of over 90% by our provincial authorities.

I would like to salute Charles Plamondon, who was our riding association president for two years. I also want to salute all the volunteers for all political parties who contribute to the democratic process in a positive and constructive way, without any pay, simply for the pleasure of standing up for their convictions. There are no wrong convictions, just people who are driven by political passions and their convictions. We can only congratulate them and thank them through Charles Plamondon, whom I salute and thank.

On May 12, the provincial wing of the Conservative Party voted in favour of a single tax return. A few days later, and the timeline is important here, the Quebec National Assembly adopted its motion. Throughout the debate today, we have heard that we support the National Assembly when it suits us and that we are following the lead of provincial parties. This is not the case. As the chronology shows, we made this decision on our own. This will have a significant political impact in Quebec, since we will be governing Canada in nine months, if that is what Canadians choose. I think we represent a serious challenge and that this is a real possibility. We want Canadians to support our party, but the decision will be theirs on October 21.

A major national party took a concrete position that is good for Quebeckers, and the National Assembly could not ignore that. All members of the National Assembly supported this motion, including members from the far left, such as members of Québec Solidaire, entrenched sovereigntists, like members of the Parti Québécois, people who were, at the time, members of the second opposition party, the Coalition Avenir Québec, and even well-known federalists, like the provincial Liberals. Everyone agreed. I will come back to this later, because as I said, some mind-boggling things have been said here today. I look forward to expanding on this.

To summarize, the leader initiated the discussion within our party, the provincial wing of the Conservative Party adopted the motion, and all of the political parties in the Quebec National Assembly agreed with it. Then, a few weeks later, the day after Quebec's national holiday, in the riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, the Conservative leader announced that a government led by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle would ensure that Quebeckers only had to fill out a single tax return like all other Canadians.

There was support for this stance. It is important to point that out because people have been talking a lot of rubbish today. Even during question period, the Prime Minister said that it was strange that we were not asking any questions in English about the single tax form, which is not true. Last week, our colleague from Calgary asked a question in English in this regard. The cameras do not show the members who are not speaking, but Canadians should have seen how shocked the Liberal ministers were to hear a question in English on this subject. I do not know how they do things in the Liberal Party, but we conservatives always say the same thing in both

official languages, whether in eastern Canada, western Canada, Quebec, Ontario or northern Canada.

The Conservative Party agrees. The vote held at a convention of over 3,000 people was almost unanimous. We debated this issue amongst ourselves, and we worked hard on this realistic and responsible proposal for Quebeckers.

In short, what is our objective? Of course, our priority is the taxpayer. Our main objective is to help 8 million Quebeckers who have been forced for too long to file two tax returns—even if they do not all file a return of course—while other Canadians file only one. We want to make their life easier. Let us not forget that this would not cost taxpayers a dime and that it can be done through an administrative agreement like so many others between the federal government and all provinces.

•(1720)

It is important to mention that, according to some, we are again trying to pander to Quebec. That is not true. Only Quebec has this problem. Only Quebeckers must file two income tax returns. We are not doing it to please Quebeckers, but to make life easier for them. That is the important thing. When I say "Quebeckers", I mean all workers in Quebec, including those who work in the federal public service and for the Canada Revenue Agency.

Therefore, it would be an administrative agreement like many others. The sovereignty of the Parliament of Canada would not be affected in any way and Parliament would continue to duly vote on all legislation and all budgetary and fiscal measures. For all regulations, laws, measures, paragraphs and forms that the government wants to pass or complete, the authority sits entirely with the elected members of the House of Commons. The Government of Quebec has nothing to do with federal taxation, and Ottawa has nothing to do with provincial taxation. That is what respecting jurisdictions is all about, and that is what we have always tried to do and have always done as Conservatives. All laws and regulations are passed in Ottawa.

People may have legitimate concerns and might think the province would be given taxation powers. That is not what would happen. Taxation power remains fully within the purview of the House of Commons and the federal government. However, it would be administered by the provincial government. That has been the case for the GST since 2011. That is important. We are talking billions of dollars transferred from the Government of Quebec to the federal government every month. The Government of Quebec collects the GST on behalf of the federal government and sends it straight here to Ottawa. It works, and it works well. It is much more efficient for businesses. It makes people's work easier, and that is a good thing. We know it is working because nobody realizes it or talks about it. That is the best evidence that it is working.

I would note that the agreement was signed in 2011 under former Canadian prime minister, the Right Hon. Stephen Harper, and Quebec Premier Jean Charest, who is well known and well liked here in the House of Commons because of his outstanding service during the good years from 1984 to 1998. Mr. Charest and Mr. Harper worked together to make the GST arrangement happen.

Business of Supply

Since then, there was a federalist Liberal government under Jean Charest and everything worked out. Then there was a minority sovereigntist government under Pauline Marois and everything worked out. After that, there was another federalist Liberal government under Philippe Couillard and everything worked out. We now have a federalist Coalition Avenir Québec government under François Legault and everything is working out.

My point is that this is not a political issue. It is about an administrative agreement like any other between the federal government and the provinces. We want to apply the same model to the single tax return. I simply want to reiterate that, under Pauline Marois' minority yet still firmly sovereigntist government, that GST agreement worked perfectly well. Horror stories about a Quebec government that got angry at some point are simply rubbish. Everything works fine with the GST. It could work just as well for the single tax return.

I now turn to the most cardinal and fundamental aspect. I was saving it for last, because it is very much at the heart of this debate and of certain things that we have heard throughout the day, things I have no words for. No jobs will be jeopardized. They will be preserved.

On January 22, in Montreal, when the official opposition announced, among other things, tax measures to allow people to return to work without being penalized, and other measures that directly address the dumping of raw sewage in our waterways and rivers—over 60,000 such dumps occur every year in Quebec, which is outrageous—our government unveiled the first elements of our environmental policy. There are still eight months left in the electoral campaign and a lot of good things to come.

• (1725)

The leader of the opposition was asked a question about the single tax return. He said that “no public service jobs will be eliminated. [Public servants will deal with tax evasion, which will be better for taxpayers.] We need public servants to ensure that our federal laws are upheld. We can also make more effective use of the people who work for the federal government”. He made himself clear. There would be no job losses.

Throughout the day we heard people fearmongering, saying that this makes no sense, that the Conservatives are jeopardizing jobs, that they should talk to the families and so on and so forth, that the world is coming to an end, that their heart was not in the right place and that they had consulted no one. That is not true. Those are lies.

The reality is that we are not going to eliminate jobs. Is that clear? There will be no job losses. I assure the people who work for the CRA in Jonquière, Shawinigan, or anywhere else that they will not lose their jobs. Those who say the opposite are lying. Okay, that is clear. Now, let us hope that is what gets reported.

I am saddened to see that my distinguished colleague, the hon. member from the Shawinigan region forgot one small detail in his 10-minute-plus diatribe, namely that the leader had taken a position and said there would be no job losses. That is too bad.

One of the other things I heard today that completely threw me for a loop was the remark from the member for Mount Royal drawing a link between filing a single tax return and the separatist threat. Those

were his exact words. Not to mention that the last time the Conservatives did that, we wound up with the Bloc Québécois.

Need I remind the member for Mount Royal, who was elected under the banner of the Liberal Party of Canada, that it was under his party that Canada nearly imploded twice? It was under a Liberal Party government that Quebec separatists gained momentum and that there were two referendums. As everyone knows, it nearly ended very badly in 1995.

Need I remind the House that the Bloc Québécois emerged immediately after the Meech Lake accord died? Who opposed the Meech Lake accord? The federal Liberal Party, and especially its leader, Jean Chrétien, who did everything he could to make sure it did not work. This had some unfortunate consequences for Quebecers, but Mr. Chrétien was so proud to go see his buddy, Clyde Wells, to thank him for everything he did. That is the Liberal Party to which the member for Mount Royal belongs. It is funny that he did not mention those things earlier.

His comments suggest that those in favour of a single tax return are separatists or are playing along with separatists. Is the member for Mount Royal prepared to say that Philippe Couillard is a separatist? Is he prepared to say that Pierre Arcand is a separatist? Is he prepared to say that Christine St-Pierre is a separatist? Is he prepared to say that David Birnbaum—whom he knows very well, as do I, because he was a colleague—is a separatist? Is he prepared to say that André Fortin, whom some already see as the leader of the provincial Liberal Party, is a separatist? Is he prepared to say that the hon. Geoffrey Kelley is a separatist? Are Saul Polo and Kathleen Weil also separatists?

It is disgraceful to see a man whom I respect and hold in esteem, a seasoned lawyer, resort to such unfortunate demagoguery. Quebecers are fed up with the member for Mount Royal's fearmongering. He claims that if an individual supports the single tax return, he or she is a separatist. That is completely false, ludicrous and grotesque.

Worse still, the people claiming that jobs will be lost are wrong. This is not the first time we have seen such scare tactics. Let me remind the House of the timeline I laid out. On May 12, we, the Conservatives, adopted a motion for a single tax return. At the time, the byelection campaign for the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord was in full swing. Chicoutimi is on the other side of the river from Jonquière. Jonquière is where the CRA tax centre is located. The people across the aisle were attacking the NDP. Need I remind anyone that the NDP was in favour of the motion at the time?

They came after us with all guns blazing, saying our proposal made no sense. They used scare tactics in the hope of frightening people into thinking they would lose their jobs. That is what we have been hearing all day. They kept repeating all this for weeks in Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. I have bad news for the pigmongers—fearmongers, I mean. Pigs have nothing to do with this. That is a whole other debate, which we will discuss when the topic of agriculture comes up.

Business of Supply

What is the reality? The Liberals tried to scare the people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, but the people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord are proud people who understand and believe the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, the leader of the official opposition, when he says there will be no job losses. That is why 53% of voters in Chicoutimi—Le Fjord voted for the Conservative Party candidate.

I would like to close by quoting the statement from Quebec's former finance minister, a diehard federalist if ever there was one.

• (1730)

He said that he was “extremely disappointed” with the Prime Minister's position “because this was something that was in the public interest” of Quebeckers.

The Conservatives—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize, but the member is out of time. I am sure that what he did not manage to say in the last few seconds can be said during the period for questions, for which we do not have much time.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent quite well. We served on a committee together.

We seem to be losing sight of why Quebeckers now have to fill out two tax returns. At some point, Quebec, as a distinct society that wanted to have control over its own development, wanted to give itself some flexibility to create tax credits and tax measures to meet its own economic and social objectives. The intention was not to cause problems for Quebeckers. There is a reason behind this Quebec form.

Why do members now want to eliminate this flexibility and maybe even adapt Quebec's tax system to the rest of Canada's tax system? Do they really want to take away Quebec's flexibility?

Mr. Joël Godin: Because they are Canadians, too.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am certain that the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent is quite capable of answering the question and does not need help.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, allow me to commend my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, who gave an absolutely exceptional speech today. When someone has been working in the House for three years, it shows. Kudos to my colleague.

To answer the question posed by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis, whom I respect and hold in high esteem, I would say that the problem is that the Liberals believe that we want to ruin everything, while the opposite is true. We simply want to make life easier for people. The province of Quebec will be able to make all the laws it wants. Ottawa will be able to make all the laws it wants. One will not interfere with the other.

I will quote the current Quebec finance minister, Éric Girard, who the member knows very well because he ran against him in the last election. He said: “It goes without saying that implementing a single tax return takes political will. There would be certain administrative

hurdles, but nothing that cannot be overcome.” That is a fine challenge for Quebeckers.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:32 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until tomorrow, Wednesday, February 6, at the end of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 6, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect that if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:45 p.m. so that we could begin private members' hour.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:47 p.m., to be exact?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

Private Members' Business

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

RESPECTING FAMILIES OF MURDERED AND BRUTALIZED PERSONS ACT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC) moved that Bill C-266, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (increasing parole ineligibility), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise to speak to Bill C-266, an act respecting families of murdered and brutalized persons. This bill would amend section 745 of the Criminal Code.

This bill has been before the House before. To quote one of my previous speeches in the House, from 2014, in this bill I want to empower our courts “with the ability to increase parole ineligibility when sentencing individuals who have abducted, sexually assaulted and killed our innocent and often most vulnerable Canadians from the current 25 years up to a maximum of 40 years.”

The bill is not about creating stiffer penalties for sadistic murderers. These depraved convicts do not qualify for parole. My bill is about saving the families of the victims from having to go through the agony of attending unnecessary and traumatic parole hearings.

Let us be perfectly clear. Bill C-266 is not about mandatory minimum sentencing. The bill is in compliance with section 12 of the Charter of Rights. It is based on the discretion of the presiding judge through a recommendation to the jury. A judge could set parole ineligibility of between 25 and 40 years. It would not be prescribed where in there it would fall. The judge would have the discretionary power to make it anywhere from 25 years of parole ineligibility to 40 years.

This legislation is modelled after a bill brought forward in a previous Parliament, Bill C-48, the protecting Canadians by ending sentence discounts for multiple murders act, which we are seeing in use today at the McArthur trial as well as for the murderer who committed the mosque massacre in Quebec. That piece of legislation affords judges the opportunity to make the parole ineligibility periods for multiple murderers consecutive rather than concurrent. Most of those convicted of these multiple murders or these heinous crimes of abducting, sexually assaulting and murdering our loved ones never get parole. Therefore, why do we continue to put families through unnecessary Parole Board hearings? There is absolutely no need to re-victimize those families.

As I mentioned, I brought the bill forward in a previous Parliament. It was introduced on February 27, 2013, as Bill C-478. The bill made it as far as the committee stage, when I was appointed parliamentary secretary, so I had to withdraw the bill. Colin Mayes, our former colleague from B.C., then picked it up as Bill C-587. That bill made it through committee and came back to the House at report stage and third reading on June 2, 2015. Of course, it never made it to the final vote before the House recessed and the election took place.

This legislation would amend section 745 of the Criminal Code, as I have previously said. Increasing parole ineligibility from 25

years to 40 years would save families from having to go through the process of attending unnecessary Parole Board hearings and making victim impact statements, which are traumatic, to say the least, and heart-wrenching for those families. The bill would eliminate eight unnecessary Parole Board hearings families would have to attend.

Sadistic murderers often apply for parole every two years, starting at year 23, for the sole purpose of toying with the families, of re-victimizing them and making them relive the gruesome killings that were committed.

The bill would change a number of subsections under section 745. It would be based upon the recommendation of a jury. The bill says that a judge would ask a jury at the time of sentencing if it wished “to make any recommendation with respect to the number of years that the accused must serve before the accused is eligible for release on parole”. When the jury was passing judgment, it could also recommend what the parole ineligibility could be. The judge would have discretion as to whether to accept that, and he or she could set it at a level he or she found appropriate. Judges on the board, when determining parole ineligibility, must have regard for “the character of the offender, the nature of the offences and the circumstances surrounding their commission”.

• (1740)

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working with a number of people on the legislation, along with Colin Mayes, the former member of Parliament from B.C. In the other place, Senator Boisvenu was a big help on this over the years. He founded an organization called Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association. This is something that he is incredibly passionate about.

Sharon Rosenfeldt's son Daryn was murdered by the notorious Clifford Olson and her organization is Victims of Violence. Susan Ashley is the sister of Linda Bright, who was killed by Donald Armstrong. Terri Prioriello's sister Darlene, also called Dolly, was murdered by David James Dobson. The organization Canadian Parents of Murdered Children has provided input over the years. This goes back some time.

I was interested in doing something for families. At the end of 2009-10, members will remember the terrible abduction, rape and murder of Tori Stafford. Terri-Lynne McClintic was arrested and prosecuted in 2010 and Michael Rafferty in 2012. During that time, while my heart was breaking listening to the Tori Stafford story, Clifford Olson was dying from cancer in prison and Sharon Rosenfeldt talked on the radio about how this killer had impacted her family over the years. He sent letters describing how he murdered her son Daryn. Because of that type of sadistic behaviour, tormenting families and using Parole Board hearings to feed his own sick appetite, it became clear to me that we needed to do something for families.

Private Members' Business

I knew full well that both murderers of Tori Stafford, Michael Rafferty and Terri-Lynne McClintic, will be applying for parole in the year 2023 after the murder in 2009. I think all Canadians would consider it unacceptable that families have to go through this ongoing saga of Parole Board hearing after Parole Board hearing.

We need to make sure the legislation targets the most depraved of society, the sadistic murderers out there who often prey on children and the most vulnerable, those who abduct, sexually assault and murder, often in a very gruesome manner. We are talking about people like Robert Pickton, Russell Williams, Michael Rafferty, Clifford Olson, Paul Bernardo, David James Dobson, Donald Armstrong, Luka Magnotta and we are watching the McArthur case unfold now in Toronto. This would apply to those individuals, particularly those who do not get consecutive life sentences. They could be given a 40-year sentence before they could apply for parole.

It is important that we talk about some of these families, like the family of Linda Bright, who was just 16 when she was abducted by Donald Armstrong in Kingston back in 1978. He has applied for parole numerous times. I have been talking to Susan Ashley, Linda's sister, and she said about the Parole Board hearings in the past, "My heart breaks having to live through this again. My heart breaks having to watch my Mom and Dad drag up their thoughts and pain from that deep place inside them where they tuck their hurt away".

Linda's mother, Margaret, said during her victim impact statement, "This is not fair. We should not have to relive our tragedy. When I remember my daughter, let me remember her as a little girl. Don't make me think about the other awful time in 1978.... Let me tell you this has been the most difficult thing I have had to do in the last twenty years."

● (1745)

Gary Rosenfeldt, who was Johnsrude's stepfather, has now passed away. His wife is Sharon Rosenfeldt. He said publicly, after going through a number of Parole Board hearings in 2006 and 2010, and even back in 1997, when there was still the faint hope clause, "What's really horrendous about this is this is only the beginning. We're going to have to do this every two years as long as Olson lives, and this is a very painful experience for myself, my family."

It should be noted that Clifford Olson died in prison. He was never paroled. These individuals do not get parole.

Darlene Prioriello was abducted, raped, mutilated and murdered by David James Dobson in 1982. He is at the Bath Institution. Darlene's sister Terri has said this about having to go through these painful, repetitive and unnecessary Parole Board hearings: "Families have already been victimized once. They shouldn't have to be victimized every two years. Having to face a loved one's killer and to read what he did to her and how her death has affected our lives is something nobody should ever have to do once, never mind twice." Unfortunately, that goes on.

We have had the Library of Parliament research how these murderers have been treated in prison and whether or not they have ever received parole. The best we can find is that some of them have been given day parole or temporary leave. They have never, ever been released back into the public on full parole. They are serving life sentences, and they will continue to do that.

A lot of people wonder how I came up with the 15 extra years in the 25 plus 15. Murder is 25 years without parole, abduction is a maximum of 10 years without parole, and sexual assault is a maximum of 4.6 years without parole. Added together, we get 40 years.

Let us be clear that I am not saying we are setting mandatory minimums, taking it up to 40 years. It is anywhere in between. The judge and the jury decide where the parole and eligibility should be set. It could be 25 years, 30 years, 35 years or 40 years. It is up to the judge and the jury to make those decisions. By respecting the independence of the court we are in compliance with chapter 12 of the charter.

We have seen this type of approach being taken with previous legislation. This judicial discretion is incredibly important, because the judge will take that recommendation, along with the regard he has to have for the character of the offender, the nature of the offences and the circumstances surrounding their commission. If the jury chooses, it can provide input as well.

I am looking forward to hearing the position of the government on this, as well as that of the NDP, but I am appealing to all members of the House to support the bill.

It should be noted that in the previous Parliament, all Liberals voted yes at second reading for this legislation. Many of them sit on the benches today, and are still here.

I want to make sure people understand that these depraved murderers, these brutal and sadistic members of society, will never be released back into society. They are not going to be released. The Parole Board of Canada continues to hold them in institutions, knowing they are dangerous offenders who potentially could reoffend, because so often they are psychopaths. Therefore, let us ensure we are not revictimizing those families by having them go to all these unnecessary Parole Board hearings and relive the murder and brutal details of how their loved ones were killed, all to the gratification of those incarcerated psychopaths.

I ask that everyone support this legislation. Let us get it to committee and let us hear from the victims organizations, the families who have been impacted and the families who are calling for this. Let us give them some peace. Let us respect their wishes and their lives so they do not have to go on and on living this nightmare.

● (1750)

As Yvonne Harvey of the Canadian Parents of Murdered Children said, "Although I have not personally faced the ordeal of a parole hearing, I have spoken to many individuals who have. I am certain that the primary intent of this bill, to spare the families of victims from having to attend unnecessary parole hearings, would be most welcomed."

Private Members' Business

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the work of my friend from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for bringing forward this initiative.

The member indicated in his remarks that he did not think the bill transgressed the Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the point about presumed cruel and unusual punishment. He claims that there is this discretion available to judges or juries on sentencing, between 25 and 40 years in his scheme. Does the member have a formal legal opinion to that effect or is that simply his idea?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, in the previous Parliament, I discussed this with the Department of Justice, along with the judicial team at the Library of Parliament, to ensure this was in compliance. It falls along the same suit of Bill C-48 from that Parliament, which is still in use today and is in compliance with the charter. This is not about anything that is considered cruel and unusual punishment. This legislation would provide full flexibility and independence to the courts to make those decisions.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, despite the fact that the bill might be in compliance, as the member has suggested, I am curious if he can explain the process of it coming through the House last time and being voted on. I understand that it sat on the Order Paper for a while. For some reason, it did not move forward from there. Why did the previous government not pick up on it? Is there any insight into why it was not moved along by the former Conservative government?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, the legislation I tabled in February 2013 was given second reading June 5, 2013, because that is when it came up in the draw. It was reinstated after the recess. It was already through second reading and referred to committee. I was then appointed parliamentary secretary and as parliamentary secretary, I was not allowed to carry any Private Members' Business.

Therefore, it was picked up by colleague, Colin Mayes, who then brought it back in April 2014. It was then given second reading around that time and referred to committee, after the summer break, on September 24. It came through committee, and if I recall, the committee was jammed up with a number of pieces of legislation. However, it was reported back on April 1, 2015, with report stage on June 2 and third reading at the same time.

Therefore, it came through the normal process of private members' bills. As the member fully knows, often we are lower in priority and have only an hour a day in the House for these types of debates. Government business takes precedence at committee over private members' bills.

I am hoping we can get everyone onside and move the bill through quicker, knowing the time frame we have in front of us, recessing at the end of June.

• (1755)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for his leadership in bringing forward the bill.

The fact is that murder is the most serious offence in the Criminal Code, but not all murders are equal. Some are so heinous, so sadistic, so violent that they are really in a special category. As the member pointed out, that is the object of the bill. I agree wholeheartedly with

him that it is important that we pass the bill at second reading to get it to committee to hear, as he said, from some of the victims' families and friends.

However, as the member pointed out, the bill was studied at committee in the last Parliament. I was not there in the last Parliament, but I did read the transcripts from the committee, and there was some very powerful testimony from victims. Could the member comment?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, Susan Ashley and Sharon Rosenfeldt were there. It was heart-wrenching for them to be there to talk about how their loved ones had been murdered and how important this legislation was. I hope we can get the bill back to committee as quickly as possible.

However, to go back to the point raised in the previous question, the reason the bill is only coming forward now is because this is when my name came up in the draw. This is why it has been sitting around for three years since I tabled it at first, and we are only getting to second reading now.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to private member's Bill C-266, an act to amend the Criminal Code, increasing parole ineligibility.

The objective of the bill is to protect victims and alleviate their re-victimization by limiting the number of parole applications in which they may need to participate. The underlying assumption of Bill C-266 is that its proposed reforms would spare families from the heartache of reliving the loss of their loved one who may have been murdered in unspeakable circumstances.

As currently drafted, Bill C-266 proposes to modify section 745 of the Criminal Code in order to effect two changes. First, it would make it mandatory for a judge to impose a parole ineligibility period of not less than 25 years for all offenders convicted of the following offences committed as part of the same event or series of events and in respect of the same victim: kidnapping and abduction-related offences; sexual offences; and murder, irrespective of whether it is in the first or second degree.

Second, the bill would provide judicial discretion to set the period of parole ineligibility between 25 and 40 years for the same small subset of offenders who, given the severity of their crimes committed, are truly unlikely to obtain parole in any event.

[*Translation*]

It should be noted that Bill C-266 is similar to previous private members' bills, including Bills C-478 and C-587. Bill C-478 got through second reading stage and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, but it did not get any further than that.

Unlike Bill C-266, former Bill C-478 did not require that the offences for which the offender was found guilty to be committed as part of the same criminal transaction.

● (1800)

[English]

Former Bill C-478 was later reintroduced as Bill C-587 by the member for North Okanagan—Shuswap and essentially proposed the same legislative amendments as Bill C-266, except for slight wording differences.

Ultimately, former Bill C-587 was adopted by the justice committee, without amendment, and had commenced third reading debate in the House, but did not proceed further because of the dissolution of Parliament for the 2015 federal election.

I want to take a moment to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for the laudable objective of the bill. I think all of hon. members of the House can agree that alleviating the trauma, emotional suffering and re-victimization of families whose loved ones have been murdered is a worthwhile cause that merits our full consideration.

[Translation]

Victims have rights at every stage of the criminal justice process, including the right to information, protection, restitution, and participation. These rights, previously recognized by internal policies of the Parole Board of Canada and Correctional Service Canada, are now enshrined in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and give clear rights to all victims of crime.

[English]

Once victims are registered with the Parole Board of Canada or the Correctional Service Canada, they can choose to receive information on the offender, including but not limited to: the sentence start date and length; and the offender's eligibility and review dates for unescorted temporary absences, parole or statutory release.

Upon further request, additional information could be provided to a victim, including: the date of any Parole Board of Canada hearing and the reason why an offender waived a hearing, if one was given; and whether the offender has appealed the decision of the Parole Board not to grant a release and the outcome of that appeal.

Victims' participation rights include the following: attending the offender's parole hearing or listening to an audio recording of a parole hearing if the victim is unable to attend in person; presenting a written statement that outlines the continuing impact the offence has had on them and any risk or safety concerns the offender may pose and requesting that the Parole Board consider imposing special conditions on the offender's release; and obtaining a copy of the Parole Board's decision, including information on whether the offender has appealed the decision and the outcome of the appeal.

I would like to pause here to highlight Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act, which is proposing other legislative changes to better support victims of crime.

Private Members' Business

Currently, victims who do not attend a parole hearing are entitled to listen to an audio recording of the hearing. However, if victims do attend, they lose their right to listen to a recording. Simply stated, parole hearings can be quite difficult for family members. Despite attending the hearing, they may not always remember everything that was said and may, for a variety of reasons, wish to listen to an audio recording at a later date. I am pleased to know that changes proposed in Bill C-83 would give all victims the right to listen to an audio recording, regardless of whether they attend the parole hearing.

The laws and policies that have been put forward were designed to be respectful of the privacy rights of victims who do not wish to be contacted or receive information about the offender who has harmed them. This recognizes the fact that victims are not a homogenous group; while some victims may choose not to attend or receive information about parole hearings in order to avoid emotional trauma, others will attend parole hearings as a means of furthering their healing and to feel empowered by having their voice heard.

In fact, on March 9, 2015, officials testifying on behalf of the Parole Board of Canada indicated during their testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on former Bill C-587 that every victim is different and that the Parole Board of Canada also has victims who are interested in attending parole hearings.

Therefore, we need to ask ourselves if the proposed amendments in Bill C-266 are the most effective way of supporting the needs of victims affected by these brutal crimes.

I also wonder, despite the bill's laudable intentions, whether some victims might feel negatively impacted by legislative changes designed to reduce the number of parole hearings they may choose to attend.

I am certain all hon. members would agree that a thorough debate on the impacts of Bill C-266's proposed changes requires consideration of these questions. Also, I would be interested to hear the views of the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman on these points.

It is clear that there are various ways of supporting victims. The changes proposed in Bill C-266 present one avenue for bettering the experience of victims at the very end of the spectrum of the criminal justice process.

As parliamentarians, we should strive to achieve a fair, effective, just and compassionate criminal justice system for all involved. For these reasons, I will be closely monitoring the debate on Bill C-266 and look forward to hearing the views of other hon. members on its potential impacts.

● (1805)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to oppose the initiative of my hon. colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman on Bill C-266. As members have heard, the bill proposes to increase the period of parole ineligibility from 25 years to up to 40 years for those convicted of heinous crimes such as abduction, sexual assault and murder.

Private Members' Business

I want to start by saying that I am not here to criticize at all the good faith of the member for this initiative coming forward. Again, this is above politics. I respect entirely his passionate commitment to victims and his not wishing through the parole process to re-victimize the people who have suffered such trauma from these heinous crimes. I therefore respect entirely the initiative and the intention behind it.

On the other hand, there are some significant problems with this initiative. It would do more harm than good, for reasons that I will describe.

My primary motivation for taking this position is that the security of prison workers is at issue. The proposed legislation could further remove the incentive for inmates to behave while incarcerated. This poses serious risks to prison workers and other inmates. The workers who look after our incarcerated population often put themselves in harm's way to do so and they are entitled to a safe workplace. For that reason alone, we cannot support the bill.

Second, as I insinuated in my earlier question for the member, lawyers whom we have consulted have serious concerns about the constitutionality of the bill. First, here is a little history. In 2010, to my surprise, the Liberals and the Conservatives voted to abolish what has been called the faint hope clause. That provided an opportunity for a hearing 15 years into a 25-year sentence. At that time, the NDP opposed what was then Bill S-6 in an effort to keep the faint hope clause alive. As previously mentioned, the rationale was to keep security personnel safe in our institutions.

The member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman's proposal would further disincentivize good behaviour in correctional facilities, with the potential of increasing violence toward other inmates and correctional workers. While I am sure that was not the intent whatsoever, this aspect is worthy of our consideration and discussion. Unfortunately, Bill C-266 may present adverse safety concerns.

Providing even a glimmer of hope for parole provides incentives for good behaviour. It reduces the prospect of violence toward other inmates and correctional workers. The bill would remove any foreseeable chance of release for those convicted of serious crimes for up to an additional 15 years, thereby further reducing the rate of rehabilitation.

If someone in prison is serving a life sentence and cannot be eligible for parole until he or she has served up to 40 years, arguably that person has nothing to lose by committing violence in prison. It can create quite a difficult situation for everyone involved. The rationale for the faint hope clause was that it incentivizes offenders to participate in programming and work toward their rehabilitation, which leads to reduced violence and better behaviour toward other inmates and correctional workers.

I do not think this is simply any kind of tough-on-crime initiative. I think it truly is, in spirit, as I said initially, a bill that is trying to look after the victims who do not want to be re-traumatized. I respect that motivation entirely.

In our current system, offenders can apply for parole two years after they are initially denied parole. After that two-year period, they are eligible to reapply after five years. I understand that victims'

families are under duress when the convicted individuals have a parole hearing, but we must not forget the safety of those prison workers and other inmates who are exposed to these individuals every single day.

● (1810)

A 2010 internal study by the Department of Justice found that this was the case, that those with nothing left to lose are more likely to resort to violence. That was confirmed in that study, which was discussed in a 2011 article in *The Globe and Mail* by Dean Beeby. He said, "A key, taxpayer-funded study supporting the faint hope clause never entered that debate because it was not released by the Justice Department." It came out under the Access to Information Act.

The June 2010 report looked at whether the faint hope clause was working. It concluded that it worked well. *The Globe* states:

"Overall, the analysis indicates that the faint hope clause is not a free pass for individuals convicted of murder," says the study....

"Those granted reduced time under faint hope do better in the community than other offenders. Lower recidivism rates from faint hope offenders suggest that decisions to release early are based on fairly accurate assessments of an offender's risk to reoffend."

There are a couple of obvious points. The Parole Board points out on its website that a life sentence means life. Lifers will never again enjoy total freedom. As well, it is important to note that seven out of 10 offenders are denied parole at their first parole review date. The board has absolute discretion to keep them back if there is a concern. The foremost consideration is the safety of the public. Most offenders released on parole successfully complete their sentences without committing new offences.

In 2013-14, 99% of federal day parole periods and 97% of federal full parole periods were successfully completed by offenders without reoffending. The evidence, it seems to me, is incontrovertible that a gradual, controlled and supervised release is the most effective way of ensuring public safety. That applies to the serious offences we are talking about in this bill as well.

I found it staggering that offenders who were released at the end of their long sentences were four times more likely to be readmitted on a new federal sentence than offenders who completed their sentences on full parole. In other words, it appears that the system, which can easily be criticized like every other institution, is actually working well in this particular context.

Extending parole eligibility beyond the current possible maximum of 25 years may have been possible sometimes in certain situations in the past, but the faint hope clause is no longer there to help mitigate any increase in parole eligibility since Bill S-6 was passed by Conservatives and Liberals in 2010.

I know I am running out of time, but the other point I wanted to make is that there is a concern about the constitutionality of having to wait up to 40 years. I have made the point about safety, but there is also the notion that lawyer Michael Spratt of Ottawa has put forward, which is that by extending it up to 40 years there is a large chance that the bill would be challenged as violating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

He also points out that the practical result would be that people would no longer plead guilty because of the fear of that. They would end up finding themselves in the justice system for longer, and the courts would be even more clogged than they are now. The member described how he arrived at the arbitrary period of 40 years. However, it is so arbitrary that I cannot believe a court would find that compelling.

The Canadian Bar Association's criminal law section likewise does not believe that Canadians would benefit from a system where individuals are effectively condemned to spend their entire lives behind bars, with no hope of ever being released.

In conclusion, the introduction of Bill C-266 would, like the abolishment of the faint hope clause and the introduction of consecutive periods of parole ineligibility, remove incentives for good behaviour in correctional facilities, thwart rehabilitation efforts and put the lives of our correctional workers in greater jeopardy. Therefore, the NDP cannot support this provision.

• (1815)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak in strong support of Bill C-266, introduced by my friend, the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. This is legislation that seeks to amend section 745 of the Criminal Code to provide a judge with the discretion to increase the parole ineligibility period from the current 25 years to up to 40 years for individuals who are convicted of abducting, sexually assaulting and murdering the same victim.

Before discussing the merits of the bill, let me just note that the bill was introduced by the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman in the last Parliament and carried forth by the former member for North Okanagan—Shuswap when the hon. member was appointed parliamentary secretary. It is a bill that passed second reading. It is a bill that was carefully studied at the justice committee. It is a bill that enjoyed the support of both Liberal and Conservative MPs, and it is a bill that simply because of timing did not make it through the last Parliament.

First degree murder is the most serious offence in the Criminal Code. That is why individuals who are convicted of this offence are subject to an automatic sentence of life and are also subject to a parole ineligibility period of at least 25 years.

However, as I noted in the question that I posed to the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, not all murders are equal. There are some murders that are so heinous, so sadistic, so violent, that they

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fall into a category unto themselves. That is the object of this piece of legislation. It is directed at those offenders, those individuals who have committed such a heinous crime and whose character is so irredeemable that for all intents and purposes, the only thing that can be done with them is to separate them from society for the rest of their lives.

My friend, the hon. member for Victoria, referred to the faint hope clause. He talked in his speech about the issues around offenders losing hope. Simply put, these offenders have no hope. They have no hope of ever seeing the light of day. However, if they are sentenced to life with a parole ineligibility period of 25 years, unless they are classified as a dangerous offender—a category that has a high threshold and is rarely applied—they would be eligible for parole even though, for all intents and purposes, those applications are dead on arrival.

That has a profound impact on victims. When the bill in the previous Parliament was studied, there was compelling evidence from victims' families, who are also victims. One was from Susan Ashley, whose sister, Linda Bright, was abducted, raped and murdered when she was 16 years old in 1978 by one Donald Armstrong. As Ashley said before the committee, when Mr. Armstrong was sentenced, the family was assured that they would never have to see or hear from him again, but in the end they did have to hear and see him again, because he applied for parole.

• (1820)

Ms. Ashley spoke of the betrayal, horror and the pain her family went through having to prepare for and then observe the parole hearing. Of course, Armstrong was never issued parole. People of Armstrong's ilk are never issued parole. Nonetheless, Ms. Ashley and her family had to go through the process. Theoretically, they could be required to go through the process again and again. Is that just? Is that fair? Is that compassionate? It is not.

My friend from Victoria raised issues about section 12 of the charter. There is precedent for this legislation in the way of Bill C-48, which provides for consecutive sentencing for individuals who are convicted of multiple murders. It has been applied on a number of occasions in courts across Canada since its passage. Some of the horrific cases in which it has been applied include the case of Douglas Garland in my province of Alberta, and of Derek Saretzky, another horrific Alberta case.

About the only thing just that came out of those horrific trials was the fact that those individuals were put away for the rest of their lives, and the victims' families had the assurance that they would never have to go through the process of a parole hearing to relive the horrors of what the likes of Saretzky and Garland did to their loved ones.

While there is consecutive sentencing for multiple murderers, what we do not have is a regime that can provide appropriate discretion in appropriate cases by judges to hold those most particularly evil killers accountable and spare families unnecessary parole hearings.

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One perfect example of that is in relation to Tori Stafford's killer. He was 28 years old when he was convicted. That means he will be eligible for parole at the age of 53. Make no mistake, when Justice Heeneey sentenced him to life without eligibility of parole for 25 years, he characterized that individual as a "monster". He is not going to see the light of day, but he will be entitled to a parole hearing at the age of 53 and then every two years thereafter. If he lives until the age of 80, Tori's family could be subject to 14 or 15 parole hearings. How is that fair, how is that just and how is that compassionate? It is not.

The law needs to be changed, and Bill C-266 would change the law in the right direction for victims.

• (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have indicated in the past, it is always a privilege to share some thoughts on important pieces of legislation and motions that come before the House.

I listened very closely to my colleague across the way as he introduced his proposed legislation. He talked a great deal about the issue of parole hearings.

I could not help but reflect on another initiative the government brought in. I believe it was Bill C-83. Through this bill, the government made some changes regarding audio recordings in parole hearings. In the past, if a criminal was up for parole and a victim of sexual assault, for example, wanted to listen to the parole hearing in person, that individual would not be allowed an audio copy of what took place at the parole hearing. Through this legislation, the government recognized that as a problem and made the necessary correction.

I mention this because I believe that if members take a look at the issues in justice and at the legislation we have brought forward in the last three years, they will see that there is much legislation that takes victims into consideration, and that is just one example. Today, as a result of that legislation, the victim of a sexual assault would be able to go to a parole hearing and listen and also request an audio recording of it so that nothing would be missed because of the atmosphere the victim might have been placed in when listening at the parole hearing.

That is one piece of legislation. We had another piece of legislation dealing with victims. We reformed the way our military laws were being dealt with to ensure that they conformed with the Criminal Code. A Victims Bill of Rights was incorporated into the legislation.

I use these cases as examples because I have found, when in opposition and even in listening to the current Conservative opposition, that at times the Conservatives seem to want to use our justice system and the law as a way to create wedges and to look tough on crime. It is that sort of mentality.

A good example of this was referenced earlier today. In his speech, my colleague talked about first degree murder. It is a crime that the criminal courts recognize for what it is: When people are convicted of first degree murder, they are going away for a long

time. However, he is right in his assertion that this does not mean that all murders are equal. Some are far more horrendous than others.

Let us stop and think about this. Members will recall that we had a huge debate not that long ago about Tori Stafford. She was the focal point of debate in the House for a great period of time. The government of the day was being criticized because Tori Stafford's murderer was transferred to a medium-security prison facility, and there was outrage from the opposition.

I raise this issue because on the surface, the legislation that is being proposed is fairly compelling in terms of support, but there are a couple of things that come to my mind.

• (1830)

First, the member who brought forward the bill was a fairly influential member of the Harper government as a parliamentary secretary. He was fairly well known among the Conservative benches. No doubt that was one of the reasons why he was elevated to parliamentary secretary. That bill did not proceed. In response to the questions posed to the member, he said that it was a timing issue, that there was not enough time. The bill sat for a lot more time than what he has given this government to deal with it.

One could question why the member feels the urgency is greater today. Was he told something that did not allow the Harper government to proceed with it? I would be very much interested in hearing the ongoing debate on this. Is that a part of what is often the case with the Conservative Party, that it likes to take a tough line?

That is the reason why I am giving the second example, which is the Tori Stafford case. Day after day, opposition members gave the false impression that this Liberal government was going about it in the wrong way. We were asked how we could do that. I heard the same thing at the local restaurant I go to on a weekly basis. People were starting to listen to what the official opposition was saying.

The Minister of Public Safety did great service to the issue when he had an internal investigation conducted and we came up with the right answer.

While some of the research was being done on the Stafford file, we found that under former prime minister Stephen Harper, other murderers had been transferred from high-security to medium-security prisons. These murderers committed not only first degree murders, but some of them committed multiple murders. After the Conservatives realized the double standard, it then became a marginal issue.

The Government of Canada did what it was supposed to do. The minister said that he would look into the matter and come back to the House, and he did. We were able to rectify the problem.

This Liberal government has been very sensitive to victims of crime with respect to the legislation we have brought forward. We have been progressive in our way of dealing with individuals in our jails. Unlike the Conservatives, we recognize that a good number of those who are in jails today will be back in our communities. Many of the reforms we have made will ensure that we have fewer victims in the future.

Our government has treated the public safety file seriously. We have not reacted to the degree the opposition has at times, which has not been in the best interests of public safety.

I listened to what the member said about this legislation. I am interested in hearing further debate on it, as this is only our first hour of debate. I would like to hear particularly from some Conservative members as to why they believe Stephen Harper did not recognize the value of the legislation, as it sat on the Order Paper for a few years.

I would also like to hear a response as to why the minister responsible at the time did not incorporate this in some of the judicial legislation that the Conservatives brought to the House. Why did the Conservative public safety minister not see fit to address this? Maybe we are missing something.

• (1835)

I can assure the House that the government is listening, will continue to listen to the debate, and will ultimately make a determination as time goes on.

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

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, February is Black History Month. Events from coast to coast to coast give Canadians an opportunity to celebrate Canada's diverse black community. For many of these communities, their stories, history and contributions, both in the past and today, do not get the recognition they deserve. Black History Month serves to remind us that we can and we must do better.

While the government talks about doing a lot of things better, it often fails to take action. A year ago, the Prime Minister said it was time to take action on anti-black racism in Canada. Budget 2018 even provided some good first steps for funding. However, even the Liberal MP for Hull—Aylmer, chair of the parliamentary black caucus, is publicly complaining about how little is actually changing. He spoke about the need for public service buy-in for the initiatives.

Unfortunately, leadership comes from the top. Before blaming the public service, we need to recognize that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism set the tone by suggesting that systemic racism does not exist in Canada. In October, I asked the minister four times to acknowledge his out-of-touch statement that systemic racism is not part of his vocabulary.

The minister's comments were an insult to racialized and visible minority Canadians. For Canada's indigenous communities, who continue to deal with the legacy of colonialism on a daily basis, his

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comments were a slap in the face. If the minister took the time to read the heritage committee's report, "Taking action against systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia", he would get a glimpse of the impact of systemic racism on the indigenous, Métis and Inuit community from Senator Sinclair and Dr. Cindy Blackstock.

Senator Sinclair said:

...systemic racism is the racism that's left over after you get rid of the racists. Once you get rid of the racists within the justice system, for example, you will still have racism perpetrated by the justice system.

The minister, to date, has yet to apologize for his comments. The minister was caught out with those outrageous comments, because it was reported in the media. He learned that systemic racism exists in Canada through a process of open and public accountability.

It is no small irony that the consultation process for Canada's anti-racism action plan was done behind closed doors. Participation was by invitation only. Canadians have no information about it. We do not know who was invited or what was said. All we know is that the consultations are now closed.

This is the same old story, time and time again. The Liberal government makes a bold announcement. It says that it is the most transparent government ever, then it engages in a pretend exercise of consultation behind closed doors. I have learned from some participants that they were asked only to comment on a few very specific questions. Some left wondering what the purpose was. Maybe it was so the government could elicit the kind of feedback on developing a program it has already decided on so that it could produce the kind of photo ops it wants.

Even members of the Liberal caucus are growing frustrated. The minister should apologize for the insulting comments and let the light of day shine on the process to develop Canada's anti-racism action plan.

• (1840)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will speak frankly. Despite Canada's reputation as a welcoming multicultural society backed by laws and policies to combat racism and discrimination, various forms of systemic racism and discrimination continue to exist and persist in Canada.

[Translation]

We know that all forms of institutional and systemic racism and discrimination have a direct impact on Canadians, indigenous peoples and racialized groups in particular. It affects them in many ways in their lives, whether during their migration process when they are looking for employment; during interactions with the justice, education, or health care systems; or when attempting to obtain services.

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[English]

Canada is also not immune to hatred and bigotry. We recognize that discrimination and racism against indigenous peoples are systemic in Canada. Past paternalistic and disempowering federal policies and institutions have perpetuated and deepened racism and discrimination against indigenous groups. Sadly enough, indigenous peoples and racialized women and girls are among the most disadvantaged groups when it comes to their economic outcomes and social participation.

[Translation]

Racism in any form is unacceptable. It cannot be tolerated. Diversity is our strength, and when we embrace it in a spirit of openness and co-operation, we all benefit significantly.

[English]

Budget 2018 had committed a total of \$42 million to address racism and discrimination targeted against indigenous peoples and racialized women and girls, to plan cross-country consultations on a new national anti-racism approach, and to enhance community supports and research to address the unique challenges faced by black Canadians. We are consulting extensively to develop this anti-racism approach and have heard first-hand from indigenous peoples across the country on the issues they are facing.

[Translation]

As the Prime Minister has said, there is no relationship more important to our government and to Canada than the one with indigenous peoples. We have made it very clear that we intend to build a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples, one that is built on a foundation of recognition, rights, respect, co-operation and partnership. We can only achieve real reconciliation when indigenous peoples are treated fairly and equally.

[English]

To that end, we have committed to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, several of which focus on addressing racism; and to creating a recognition and implementation of indigenous rights framework, which will ensure that the recognition and implementation of rights is the basis for all relations between indigenous peoples and the federal government.

[Translation]

Reconciliation is not only an indigenous problem; it is a Canadian imperative. Similarly, we must combat and try to eradicate all forms of institutional and systemic racism and discrimination that affect our country's social cohesion.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, since it is Black History Month and the anti-racism planned consultations are apparently over, I would have thought the Minister of Canadian Heritage would take this opportunity to stand in the House, apologize for his comments and lay out the path forward. The parliamentary secretary acknowledges there is systemic racism, yet the minister said that is not in his vocabulary.

Sadly, this is not the case. Whether it is the housing crisis at Cat Lake or reports of coerced sterilization, the indigenous community is well aware that systemic racism exists. Canada's black community knows it well, too. Today, black Canadians are still stopped far more frequently than other groups of Canadians through the practice of carding. In 2016, former Hamilton city councillor Matthew Green, who will be running for the NDP in Hamilton Centre this fall, was street checked while merely waiting for a bus. Black lives matter and the time for action is now.

• (1845)

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, I can edify my colleague with the news that the Government of Canada remains committed to meaningful, evidence-based, community-involved and whole-of-government initiatives in the pursuit of equality and growth for all Canadians. That is why budget 2018 committed \$23 million to Canadian Heritage to address racism and discrimination targeted against indigenous peoples and racialized women and girls and to support cross-country consultations on a new national anti-racism approach.

Budget 2018 had also committed \$19 million to Canadian Heritage and the Public Health Agency of Canada to provide community supports for Canadian black youth at risk and to develop research in support of more culturally focused mental health programs in the black community.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is a very sensitive matter before the House of Commons: the trial of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman. It would take me two hours to go into all the details, but for now I will just briefly review what has happened so far.

First of all, I want everyone to remember that Vice-Admiral Norman's case began while he was the commander of the Canadian navy. On November 18, 2014, Admiral Norman informed the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence that there was a problem with our supply ships and that the navy was no longer able to meet its operational needs. The navy was unable to acquire one or two supply ships to supply our frigates around the world. Then, the government of the day, the Harper government, said solutions would have to be found because contracts awarded under the national shipbuilding strategy to Vancouver's Seaspan were not yet under way. The shipyard had not even begun building the supply ships the Conservative government of the day had ordered.

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We started to look at what had to be done. There was an operational problem. Federal Fleet Services, a partner of the Davie shipyard in Lévis, in the Quebec City region, had a genius idea to convert a civilian supply ship for the Royal Canadian Navy at a good price and within a short deadline. This would get the Royal Canadian Navy its equipment as quickly as possible. On August 1, 2015, then prime minister Mr. Harper decided to award the contract to build the *Asterix* to Federal Fleet Services and to the Davie shipyard. The following day was the start of the election campaign, which lasted until October 19, 2015. A new government came in after the election and inherited the file. The contract had been awarded, but the official decree had not been signed.

I have here a document containing all of the details so far. This record of events shows that different stakeholders were putting enormous pressure on the new government to prevent the Davie shipyard from getting the contract. The deadline for signing the contract was November 20, 2015. Right up until the very last minute, everything was being done to prevent the contract from being signed.

That is when the problems began.

Then, Vice-Admiral Norman, who became second in command at the Canadian Armed Forces, was charged and is now being tried.

We understand that this matter is currently before the courts. What matters to us right now is the political game being played. We know it and we see it. We are no fools. Everyone knows it.

We want Admiral Norman to have all the evidence and all the exchanges that were made between the various stakeholders to ensure that he has a full and complete defence. This man must not pay for political games. If he made a mistake, then he will pay the price, but for now he has to be able to properly defend himself and we want to know why the government is refusing to provide this information.

•(1850)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are two reasons why the government must refrain from commenting on this matter.

First, it is important to respect the role of the director of public prosecutions and the independent prosecutor who reports to her. Second, according to the *sub judice* convention, it is inappropriate to discuss matters that are before the courts.

To begin with, it should be noted that the case in question is being prosecuted by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, which operates independently from the Department of Justice. Lawyers with the Attorney General of Canada are meeting all their obligations to the court regarding counsel's third party record applications. It is also important to remember that the matter currently before the Ontario Court of Justice is an application for third party records at a criminal trial.

[English]

Defence counsel seek to obtain relevant documents from certain government departments and entities. To be very clear, these are not

the relevant documents provided to defence counsel in a criminal proceeding under first party disclosure obligations, which is known as Stinchcombe disclosure. What is now before the court is third party disclosure, meaning relevant documents that are not in the possession of the prosecutors and presumed to be in the possession or control of a third party.

[Translation]

Third party record applications are a two-step process. In the first step, the court must decide whether the requested records are relevant to the criminal proceedings. In the second step, the court must carefully examine the records and determine whether those that have been deemed relevant truly are relevant. Next, the court issues a ruling as to the public interest immunity versus confidentiality, striking a balance between those interests and the degree to which the records are needed to allow the accused to make a full answer and defence. The court ultimately determines whether the relevant records are held by a third party and, if so, whether to order that they be shared with the defence.

[English]

Witnesses in third party record applications are called to provide evidence in respect of the existence and availability of relevant records. Counsel for the defendant may ask a wide range of questions and raise a variety of allegations in the course of the examination. However, nothing has been proven or accepted by the court as a fact at that point. Such determinations are for the court to make at the appropriate stages of the proceedings.

I would reiterate that it is improper to speak on matters that are under active deliberation before the courts and that counsel to the Attorney General of Canada is clearly fulfilling all of their obligations before the court with respect to third party record applications.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for the government's response to my question.

I understand why he answered that way and the legal aspect of this matter. There is a political aspect too, however. The Prime Minister has the power to lift the publication ban for certain documents. He has the power to require that the documents requested be turned over.

I would like to know if my colleague believes the Prime Minister should use that power to help Admiral Norman.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, there is a legal rule and a rule of convention called the *sub judice* rule, which restrains parliamentarians on statements made about ongoing legal proceedings, especially criminal cases before the courts. Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals, which are courts of record. The purpose of this *sub judice* convention is to protect the parties in a case awaiting or undergoing trial and persons who stand to be affected by the outcome of a judicial inquiry. As the Supreme Court of Canada has stated, "It is a wise principle that the courts and Parliament strive to respect each other's role in the conduct of public affairs."

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•(1855)

[English]

ASBESTOS

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is the start of a new year and Canada has a ban on asbestos. Well, that is not quite true. While I applaud the government for moving to ban this deadly substance, I am perplexed and disappointed that it has decided to allow exemptions. The final regulations have been watered down considerably. Most worrisome and troubling are the chlor-alkali plants that will be allowed to continue to use asbestos for 10 more years, despite alternatives being available.

How we get from a ban to exemptions can only be explained by heavy-duty lobbying by the asbestos industry, and a government that did not stand up for workers and their health. I say this because there is no evidence whatsoever to the claims being made by industry to allow exemptions. The only evidence to continue exemptions is to ensure good profits for a few at the expense of many, putting at risk the health of Canadians to make a buck.

Companies will also be allowed to sift through mining waste with asbestos concentrations of up to 40% to look for magnesium. I need to add that there will be no big-wig CEO sifting through asbestos-laden mining waste. Workers trying to make a living will be the ones putting not only their lives on the line but the health of their families, friends and communities.

Kathleen Ruff, who has campaigned for years for a ban on asbestos, is also disappointed that the government has “weakened their proposed regulations and succumbed to lobbying by vested interests”. The government promised three years ago that it would bring in a comprehensive ban on asbestos, the deadliest industrial killer, yet the regulations that have just gone into effect have been weakened by allowing exemptions. Between the time the proposed regulations were made public in January 2018 and the time the final regulations were published in late October, the government had added new exemptions.

In his promise to ban asbestos, the Prime Minister said, “We know that its impact on workers far outweighs any benefits that it might provide”, but the final regulations contradict this statement.

The government estimates that asbestos exposure was responsible for approximately 1,900 lung cancer cases in 2011 and 430 cases of mesothelioma. According to these statistics, throughout the duration of Canada's proposed seven-year to 10-year time-limited exclusion, asbestos will be the cause of cancer for over 16,000 individuals in Canada.

Just yesterday, the Minister of Health talked about the government's commitment to helping Canadians take action to prevent cancer, and I agree. I would suggest that a total, comprehensive ban on asbestos should be a priority for a minister of health committed to preventing cancer, yet the Quebec and federal governments have both contributed millions of dollars in funding for Alliance Magnesium to extract magnesium from decades of asbestos mine tailings in Quebec.

Now that the government has finally acknowledged the dangers of asbestos to human health, it makes no sense that its ban on

asbestos allows so many exemptions. Will the government immediately move to disallow these dangerous exemptions, stand up once and for all to the asbestos lobby, and protect the health of workers and all Canadians?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to respond to comments made by the hon. member for Saskatoon West regarding asbestos. This is clearly an important issue, and her advocacy on this issue is important.

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting the environment and safeguarding the health of Canadians from toxic substances. That is clear.

The government recognizes that asbestos can cause life-threatening diseases and is proud to have taken action by banning asbestos and products containing asbestos. These regulations prohibit the import, sale and use of asbestos, as well as the manufacture, import, sale and use of asbestos-containing products, with a limited number of exclusions. Those were highlighted by the member for Saskatoon West.

These new regulations, along with existing provincial controls, will prohibit activities using asbestos mining residues that could pose health risks. During the development of the regulations that are now in place, the department held consultations with a wide variety of stakeholders, including industry, non-governmental groups, labour organizations, health and safety institutes, and provincial ministries and agencies.

The member can be assured that all the information and comments received in response to the proposed regulations were taken into consideration in the development of the final workup of the regulations. Through these consultations I just mentioned, it was determined, for example, that the Quebec government has controls in place to manage the risks associated with the use of asbestos mining residues. In addition, there are numerous regulations in place across Canada to protect the health and safety of all workers, including those working with asbestos mining residues.

While the new regulations do not generally apply to asbestos mining residues, they do prohibit certain activities, including the sale of asbestos mining residues for use in construction and landscaping, unless authorized by the province in which the construction or landscaping occurs. The regulations also prohibit the use of asbestos mining residues to manufacture a product that contains asbestos.

Allowing the extraction of valuable metals, such as magnesium, from asbestos mining residues is an important economic opportunity. Furthermore, allowing the use of asbestos mining residues for the rehabilitation of former mine sites will lead to a reduction in asbestos mining residues over time.

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• (1900)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Madam Speaker, I have heard all these rationales before. There is no such thing as a safe level of exposure to asbestos. Every single one of Quebec's health authorities has asked the federal government to use its authority and not to exempt mining waste. The facts about asbestos are irrefutable. For more than a century, asbestos has been known to be a deadly cause of diseases. All types of asbestos cause cancer. There is no such thing as a safe level of exposure or a safe controlled use of asbestos.

There are numerous pathways of asbestos exposure for those mining, transporting, handling, repairing, removing and disposing, in particular in the chlor-alkali industry. All exemptions will impact the efficacy of the Canadian ban and signal to importers and users in the United States and around the world that industry comes before health and the environment in Canada.

Why does the government ignore the evidence and continue to put Canadians at risk?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, while I appreciate the member for Saskatoon West and her comments in the House, the issue of the health of Canadians is a fundamental priority for the government, as it should be for all parliamentarians.

Again, the regulatory approach we are taking to asbestos mining residues is consistent with the government announcement that was made in December 2016. At that time, we indicated that we would prohibit asbestos and products containing asbestos, but would allow the use of asbestos mining residues for the extraction of valuable minerals.

While the new regulations do not apply to asbestos mining residues, they do prohibit the sale of asbestos mining residues for use in construction and landscaping, unless authorized by the province in which that construction or landscaping occurs. The regulations also prohibit the use of asbestos mining residues to manufacture a product that contains asbestos.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:03 p.m.)

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