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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Charlottetown.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RED DEER OPTIMIST REBELS

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, determination, teamwork and belief in their coaches propelled the Red Deer Optimist Rebels to gold at the Canadian men's midget AAA championship on April 29 at the Telus Cup in Leduc.

Checking the score on the way to the airport, I heard the result after two periods, five to one for their Quebec opponents, but Red Deer did have a power play to start the third.

The Rebels owned the third, burying four goals to send this exciting game into overtime.

After a scoreless 10-minute extra period, Nick Glackin tipped a shot from Rebel captain Brady Bakke to cap off one of the most thrilling games in tournament history.

Coach Doug Quinn truly instilled the pride it takes to build champions. He told his team that anything could happen, and it did.

In this, their ninth appearance at this tournament with three previous gold medal games where they had come up just short, they truly are deserving of the title of national champions.

I congratulate the Red Deer Optimist Rebels, the players, their coaches and their fans.

[Translation]

MONTREAL'S HOMELESS ORGANIZATIONS

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish my father a wonderful 80th birthday. He taught me that altruism is far better than individualism.

It was this desire to help others that led a number of organizations to establish RAPSIM, the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal, 35 years ago. These organizations, such as the well-known Maison du Père, help the least fortunate in society.

RAPSIM's work is highly respected and has been supported financially for a number of years by the homelessness partnering strategy, the HPS, which is governed by the Canada-Quebec agreement, but after 12 years, the funding has disappeared. The Minister of Human Resources suddenly decided that she would no longer honour the agreement, which was renewed less than a year ago, or abide by the recommendations of Quebec's health network or the HPS federal-provincial committee.

Where is the respect for provincial jurisdictions? Are groups like RAPSIM being punished because they are daring enough to stand up for such subversive rights as the right to housing or to health? Is this a case of my way or the highway?

* * *

[English]

FRENCH EDUCATION

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to a historic event that took place in the beautiful riding of Pickering—Scarborough East, home of Canada's first urban national park.

On April 25, Le Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud marked the start of construction of two French Catholic elementary schools in Toronto.

We are proud that one of the schools will be built in our riding at 29 Meadowvale Road, a picturesque location beside Wanita Park and a short distance from the Rouge Park.

The school will open its doors in a modern eco-friendly building in September 2013 and will accommodate 250 students from kindergarten to grade 6.

Statements by Members

I thank Mr. Yves Lévesque, chairman; Mr. Rejean Sirois, director of Education Le Conseil Scolaire; and, Mr. François Broileau, Ontario French Languages Services Commissioner for the excellent work they have done in improving French education in our community.

[Translation]

I would also like to thank all the members of the community for actively participating in and supporting this important project.

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[English]

DAVID WEATHERHEAD

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 25, David Weatherhead, the first member of Parliament for Scarborough West, passed away.

David was first elected in 1968 and again in 1980. While fiercely partisan, David had the generosity of spirit which enabled him to extend his hand in friendship to all members of Parliament.

David arrived in this place feeling that the rules and procedures of the House and committees needed to be reformed. He felt that, in order to deal with a backlog of legislation, the rules needed to be changed. One of the suggestions he put forth was that speeches by members should be limited to 20 minutes. However, David believed that the rights of all members, especially those of opposition members, to express themselves on an issue should be respected.

On behalf of the Liberal Party, I extend our condolences to David's family and friends. I also want to thank David for his service.

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SPORT

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, minor hockey, baseball, soccer and other sports programs teach our youth the skills of sport as well as discipline, sportsmanship and teamwork.

April marked the end of another hockey season in Don Valley West for the York Mills Hockey Club, the Don Mills Civitan Hockey League, the Leaside Hockey Association, the Toronto Leaside Girls Hockey League and the Pro Action Hockey League playing at Angela James Arena.

May marks the start of yet another season of baseball and soccer throughout the neighbourhoods of Don Valley West.

Today I want to pay tribute to all the parents, coaches and other volunteers from these and other minor sports groups in Don Valley West who give so generously of their time and energy to make possible these minor sports programs for our children.

Their hard work is worth it. On behalf of our youth and the whole community, we give a heartfelt thanks.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the carnation is Canada's oldest and most recognized symbol of hope in the quest to end multiple sclerosis.

Many Canadians living with multiple sclerosis are mothers. Others, either children or adults, have mothers affected by this disease, because women are diagnosed with MS three times as often as men. That is why every year the MS carnation campaign takes place over Mother's Day weekend.

From May 10 to May 12, thousands of volunteers in more than 280 communities across Canada will be showing their dedication to finding a cure by selling carnations on street corners, at malls and other public spaces.

Today there is renewed hope for MS victims as new treatments are being discovered and validated.

I know that members on both sides of the House will join me and the many families that have been touched by MS in supporting the research necessary to bring hope into reality. Let us support this effort by purchasing a carnation. Today, together, we can end MS.

* * *

• (1410)

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen the absurd censorship on certain university campuses regarding pro-life issues. This is a serious concern, and now this censorship has become an issue in some schools with the "life is wasted without Jesus" T-shirt issue and others like it.

Members should not get me wrong. I am not opposed to some censorship. Certainly grungy, smutty messages on T-shirts should be kept out of schools. However, a T-shirt that merely says "life is wasted without Jesus"?

Why the seemingly growing agenda against freedom of speech when it comes to Christian or pro-life issues?

This seems so un-Canadian, or at least it would have 30 years ago.

This ridiculous, unhealthy censorship is wrong. It is simply wrong and it must be stopped. Who will stop it? It is up to the people.

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MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to wear a carnation to support Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month and to help kick off the MS carnation campaign.

This program raises funds for MS research and provides support to individuals and families touched by the disease. Those of us who have a family member with MS understand the struggle that it can present.

While Canada, unfortunately, has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, the good news is that we have some of the best researchers. In fact, there has never been a more hopeful time for Canadians with MS.

Statements by Members

Canadian researchers continue to learn more about the causes and develop treatments to manage the difficult symptoms.

We must all commit to ending MS within our lifetimes.

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HUNGER AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to mark this year's Hunger Awareness Week, Food Banks Canada has issued a challenge to parliamentarians from all parties to fast for one day so they can experience what it feels like to go hungry.

Hunger is a significant problem in our country. Each month, close to 900,000 Canadians are assisted by food banks, and 38% of those helped are children. In a country as wealthy as Canada, there is no excuse for letting our most vulnerable citizens go hungry. Hunger can be solved by addressing the root cause, which is poverty.

Two effective ways parliamentarians can address this issue is by increasing affordable housing and raising seniors' pensions.

I join with over 140 parliamentarians and staff who are going hungry today to make a point. I ask that all parliamentarians work together to eliminate hunger and poverty in our country.

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GARTH WEBB

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently learned of the passing of Mr. Garth Webb, a veteran of the Second World War and the D-Day landings. Mr. Webb was a determined leader who worked tirelessly to ensure recognition for Canada's veterans.

As the leader of the Juno Beach Association, Mr. Webb was instrumental in building the Juno Beach Centre in France. The memorial and interpretive centre, which pay homage to the Canadian effort in the Second World War, especially the Battle of Normandy in 1944, exist today because of Mr. Webb's great dedication.

[Translation]

Even after his death, the Juno Beach Centre will remain as a testament to his passion and as a tribute to the courage and determination of Canada's Second World War veterans.

• (1415)

[English]

The sacrifice and service of Canadian veterans such as Garth Webb serve as an example to all. I offer my most sincere condolences to his family and to his friends.

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[Translation]

RAPE AND GENDER VIOLENCE

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the Nobel Women's Initiative launched the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict. Rape is being increasingly used as an intentional strategy in

conflict. Women are mainly targeted, in order to sever community ties even after the conflict is over.

According to American researchers, 1,152 women and girls were raped every day in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006 and 2007. Unfortunately, in most countries, it is very difficult to get accurate statistics because very few rapes are reported.

However, what is certain is that the perpetrators of these crimes too often go unpunished. Women and girls as well as men and boys throughout the world have the right to access justice. The purpose of the campaign is to promote change and to put an end to rape by allowing victims to be heard.

I invite all members of the House to join this international campaign by visiting stoprapeinconflict.org. By spreading this message, we will finally be able to put an end to gender violence in conflict.

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[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 62nd anniversary of the creation of the European Union. Canada enjoys the oldest formal relationship with the EU, dating back to 1959. Since then, the already close relations between us have significantly strengthened because we recognize the importance of growing our mutual economic and security interests. As a result, the EU represents Canada's second-largest trade and investment partner and is a natural ally on foreign and security issues.

The trade agreement we are now negotiating with the EU is our most ambitious trade agreement ever. It is a key part of our government's pro-trade plan to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity in London, Ontario and across Canada. The benefits will be widespread and stimulate the economy in every single region of our country.

Our government's position is clear. We are taking a strong stand against protectionism as we move forward with new free trade agreements around the world. We do this for the sake of Canadian families. We do this for the sake of Canadian jobs. We do this to provide the conditions that will ensure Canada maintains the strongest economy in the industrialized world.

*Oral Questions***WORKPLACE SAFETY**

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago today, a spark deep in the southeast section of the Westray coal mine in Nova Scotia triggered a massive explosion that trapped and killed 26 miners. The force of the blast shattered windows and shook homes in nearby Stellarton and New Glasgow.

Today, we remember those miners who died needless deaths, deaths that were the result of greed, mismanagement and failed government oversight. Rescue teams and draegermen worked tirelessly in treacherous conditions in search of survivors. Their bravery and heroism captivated the nation and put the spotlight on worker safety and corporate accountability. Their efforts led Parliament, under the leadership of my former Liberal colleagues Martin Cauchon and Andy Scott, to unanimously pass the Westray bill.

The Westray bill was a positive step, but we are reminded today that more can and needs to be done to improve worker safety and corporate accountability in our country.

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[*Translation*]**FRENCH LANGUAGE**

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to say how proud I am to represent my constituents and to be able to do so in the language we cherish and defend in Quebec: French. Defending the values of the Quebec nation means affirming the French fact in Quebec.

The orange wave is causing French to disappear from this House, and it is an insult to our identity as Quebecers to see all the NDP MPs from Quebec debate and ask half their questions in English.

I am proud of my French roots, of the people who founded our Canadian nation. At no time should a French-Canadian politician be attacked for honourably serving his country in his mother tongue.

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● (1420)

[*English*]**WORKPLACE SAFETY**

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Westray mine disaster in Plymouth, Nova Scotia, where 26 coal miners lost their lives in one of Canada's worst mining disasters. Our hearts go out to all the families and friends of the miners who lost their lives.

We also honour the entire community that mobilized to assist in a search and rescue following the explosion, especially the search and rescue teams and those brave draegermen. Justice Peter Richard of the Westray inquiry described Westray as “a story of incompetence, of mismanagement, of bureaucratic bungling, of deceit, of ruthlessness, of cover-up, of apathy, of expediency, and of cynical indifference”.

Former NDP leader Alexa McDonough kept her promise to the Westray families by pushing for changes to the Criminal Code. She

laid the groundwork for the 2004 Westray bill that holds corporate managers and employers criminally responsible for endangering the lives of workers.

As our brothers and sisters of the United Steelworkers remind us, we must enforce the law to ensure that another Westray never happens again.

May God bless the memory of those 26 miners.

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CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week the newly minted NDP chief soft-on-crime spokesman and member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca stood in this House and, shockingly, delivered a statement praising the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies for standing up for the rights of both offenders and victims. No doubt the first part of that statement is probably correct.

Unbelievably, this is the same organization that claimed to the public safety committee that front-line prison guards strip-searching convicted criminals to prevent the trafficking of contraband and drugs was “state-sponsored sexual assault”.

Standing up for this special interest group shows just how opposed the NDP is to the values that are important to Canadians and Canadian families.

Unlike the NDP, our government will always put the rights of law-abiding Canadians ahead of the rights of criminals.

ORAL QUESTIONS[*English*]**THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one-third of the Conservative budget bill is dedicated to dismantling environmental protection. Canadians will no longer have the right to participate in public hearings. Key independent agencies will be cut out of the process. Ministers will be given the power to ignore the facts, ignore the science and reverse any decision they do not agree with.

Why is the Prime Minister trying to sneak through these changes in a 421-page budget bill?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the statement by the leader of the NDP is completely false. The fact of the matter is that as part of the government's economic action plan to encourage jobs, growth and long-term prosperity, we are streamlining the environment assessment process. It will be extremely thorough. It will be for major projects up to two years. We know that the NDP opposes these kinds of projects completely. However, we have to have a process that is environmentally thorough but that ultimately does allow projects to be approved under some circumstances.

* * *

PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Project dismantle, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

It is not only environmental assessments that the government wants to scrap. During the 2006 election campaign, the Prime Minister promised to establish a new Public Appointments Commission. He said that such a commission would “establish merit-based criteria” and “ensure that competitions are widely publicized and equitably administered”. The Prime Minister has not kept his word and is now dismantling this commission.

Why is the Prime Minister hiding the fact that he is breaking a promise on accountability in a budget bill?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is ironic, because the NDP voted against establishing that Public Appointments Commission. Furthermore, they are the ones who asked us to stop spending money on it. During that time, we established very clear qualifications for appointments, and we abide by them by appointing people based on merit.

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[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is giving us another history lesson. Actually, we voted for the accountability act.

Back in the days of the sponsorship scandal, the Prime Minister had great respect for the Auditor General. The Prime Minister campaigned on expanding the Auditor General's powers and increasing the Auditor General's budget. However, buried in the 421 pages of his budget bill, the Prime Minister is taking away the power of the Auditor General to monitor 12 separate agencies.

What kind of budget act slashes oversight of the budget? Is that why he does not want anybody paying too close attention to his budget bill?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these changes have been done in concert with the Auditor General.

Let me go back and remind the NDP of the record when this government tried to name a nominations commissioner. The NDP voted against the establishment of that. That is the fact. The fact of

the matter is, of course, the NDP has long demanded that we cease spending money on this. What the government has done is establish very clear qualifications for any appointed position in this government. We have named only people who meet those qualifications. That is why the NDP has not found a single instance of somebody not being nominated on merit.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the government that has two sets of books on the F-35 and now is telling Canadians “just trust us” on the budget, on appointments, et cetera. I do not think so.

This is also the government that claimed for ages that each plane would cost \$75 million and then attacked anybody who contradicted it. Last week, the Department of National Defence sent officials to Washington to get updated numbers on the escalating costs of the F-35.

Can the procurement minister share with Canadians the new cost numbers?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been said many times, we are following diligently the recommendations of the Auditor General and going beyond. There is a seven-step action plan in place. We are following that process. Those answers will be forthcoming in the fullness of time.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister is having trouble figuring out which set of books to enter those numbers into.

Yesterday the report on plans and priorities for DND revealed the familiar procurement pattern of delays and cost escalation. This time it is the Arctic icebreaker, pushed back to 2018. The Conservatives promised it in 2013 and then by 2015. In the meantime, costs have escalated by \$40 million and counting.

Why has every Conservative procurement project been late, over budget and poorly managed?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a very strange question from a party that does not support any acquisition whatsoever for our military men and women. However, our government is committed to providing our Canadian Forces with modern, capable equipment, including the Arctic offshore patrol ships. These ships will be built in Canada and will allow our proud Royal Canadian Navy to enforce our northern sovereignty in a way that he would not appreciate.

We will continue to do the best we can in this regard.

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CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently the Minister of the Environment referred to the “money laundering” activities of several registered charities in the country.

Oral Questions

Given the fact that the Canada Revenue Agency is supposed to be politically neutral, is not supposed to be a political arm of the Conservative Party of Canada or of the Government of Canada and is supposed to be objective and confidential, does the Prime Minister not realize that the kinds of comments made by his minister in fact point to a political campaign against a number of registered charities which the government simply does not like? Does he not understand the dangers—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency is independent of the government and is tasked with enforcing the law. The laws with respect to registered charities are clear. In fact, we are taking steps to ensure they are crystal clear. However, they are clear that there are limits to political activities for donations that people give on a tax receivable basis for charitable causes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister cannot deny that there is a problem. At the end of April, Canadians disclosed their financial information to the Canada Revenue Agency. They expect the agency to be impartial and they expect that the information will not be used for political purposes.

Why is the Prime Minister allowing his minister to make personal and political attacks against charities that the minister singles out for the Canada Revenue Agency to attack?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Canada Revenue Agency operates independently and is responsible for enforcing the tax laws. There are very clear rules for charities that engage in political activities. There are clear parameters, and the agency is responsible for enforcing the rules.

[*English*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is ignoring this by not clearly indicating that the remarks made by the Minister of the Environment are simply unacceptable.

He has a Conservative-dominated committee in the Senate that is going after particular environmental charities. It is not going after the Fraser Institute. It is not going after the Manning Institute. It is not mentioning the fact that the Fraser Institute got \$0.5 million from the Koch brothers in the United States. It is not doing that.

However, it is going after environmental charities which are attempting to protect the lifeblood of Canadians. That is what it is doing.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party suggests that we should pick and choose certain charities. The reality—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, in terms of our own giving and our own political preferences, it is our absolute right to do so.

What is incumbent upon all charities is that they respect the laws regarding political activities. Those laws are clear. We will make them even clearer. The Canada Revenue Agency has an excellent record of the non-partisan enforcement of these rules.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Commissioner of the Environment gave Canadians a serious warning.

The Conservatives have failed on every count when it comes to managing climate change and cleaning up contaminated sites. Their short-term vision includes cuts that will have disastrous consequences for our economy and future generations.

Why does the minister believe that our children should pay for his mistakes?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

[*English*]

I would suggest, though, that close reading of the environment commissioner's report indicates he is under-informed on the federal contaminated sites program. The report fails to grasp that the program addresses only the most contaminated sites. Hundreds of lower-level sites are the responsibility of 16 custodial departments and agencies. The good news is that the commissioner acknowledged we had cleaned up almost 50 of the tar—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the Conservatives are under-informed about what the environment commissioner had to say.

Yesterday at the committee the Conservatives blocked the environment commissioner from talking about environmental assessments and their impact on future contaminated sites. They blocked the environment commissioner from talking about the environment.

Will the minister find his backbone and put a stop to this environmental train wreck?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we received the report of the environment commissioner with interest. We also received his compliments on the achievements and progress we have made in a number of areas.

It is clear, with regard to climate change, that the commissioner had points of reference that were at least a year out of date. With regard to contaminated sites, as I said, he clearly misunderstands the federal program.

We are working to address our environmental challenges in our country, and we will get that done.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are also trying to muzzle critics by attacking organizations such as Tides Canada, which just won a national award for its leadership, transparency and good governance.

The Conservatives also received an award this week, the Code of Silence Award from the Canadian Association of Journalists for the least transparent government in all of Canada.

Why are the Conservatives constantly attacking well-managed, transparent organizations? The Conservatives are poor managers. Are they jealous of these organizations?

● (1435)

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, section 241 prevents me from commenting directly on any specific case. It also protects the privacy of Canadian taxpayers, and that includes charities as well.

Our government does understand that registered Canadian charities are very important to our society. We encourage Canadians to donate very generously.

We must also ensure that those donations used for the purpose for which they were intended.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Tides Canada has been targeted and attacked by Conservative ministers, and that is wrong. It was recognized yesterday for showing leadership, transparency and accountability. It is one of the best run NGOs in all of the country.

The Conservatives won the Code of Silence award from the Canadian Association of Journalists for being the worst government in Canada for secrecy. The government should be learning from NGOs like Tides Canada and not attacking them.

When will the government stop attacking Canadians who disagree with its policies?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that registered charities are a very important part of our society, as I said.

We are taking actions so Canadians can be assured that charities are using their resources appropriately. Canadians are donating to charities and they want to know their donations are being used for the purpose for which they donated.

* * *

[Translation]

POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that SNC-Lavalin executives contributed no less than \$25,000 to Conservative riding associations in 2009.

Riadh Ben Aïssa, the former vice-president of SNC-Lavalin who was arrested in Switzerland for corruption and money laundering, was one of the generous donors. The associations then transferred

large sums of money to the riding of the then-minister of Public Works.

Did that fundraising campaign influence any contract awards?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, our government has put an end to contributions from private companies and brought in strict limits for contributions from individuals.

However, I have before me evidence that Mr. Novak, vice-president of SNC-Lavalin, contributed \$7,000 to the opposition leader's party when he was a member of the provincial Liberal Party. I would like the member to stand up and explain that.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the government across the floor.

Thanks to the Conservatives, SNC-Lavalin is doing very well, thank you very much, and thanks to SNC-Lavalin, the Conservatives are raking in a lot of money. A dozen or so SNC-Lavalin executives and their spouses have donated generous sums to the same association. SNC-Lavalin also happened to win contracts for the Canada Pavilion at the Shanghai International Expo and the Dahla Dam project in Afghanistan.

Do the Conservatives really expect us to believe that there is no connection between the contracts awarded to SNC-Lavalin and the thousands of dollars in donations?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we did everything in accordance with all laws and procedures.

The opposition leader has not answered my question. A vice-president of SNC-Lavalin donated \$7,000 to the opposition leader's party when he was a member of the provincial Liberals. I would like him to rise here and explain this.

● (1440)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians are seeing is the latest in-and-out scheme from the Conservative Party. This one stars none other than the notorious SNC-Lavalin.

Here is how it works. It took 10 top SNC executives, who sent donations into two dead dog ridings, and the money was then flowed out to key ridings in Quebec, including, in particular, the now-disgraced Minister of Industry, who was then the public works minister, and at the time there were numerous contracts floating around.

I would like to ask him what the quid pro quo was for the money.

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already invited the leader of the NDP to rise and explain why his party received \$7,000 from the vice-president of SNC-Lavalin. Three times now he has refused to rise and explain his own conduct. He says that anybody who receives a donation from that company or its members has done something wrong. Why is he pointing one finger at us and three fingers at himself?

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad he is getting practice for 2015 when he will be asking us all kinds of questions. At least by then he might start getting his facts right, so he should keep practising.

Meanwhile, the question is to the fact that we have justice department lawyers parked and idle, while the Prime Minister is dinging taxpayers to cover lawyers for him in the Helena Guergis case. We all remember how he made all these unsubstantiated claims against Madam Guergis, which he was unable to substantiate. No wonder he is getting sued.

Therefore, it is a simple question. How much are taxpayers being dinged to defend the Prime Minister against the unsubstantiated claims that he made against a former colleague?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again is 100% fact free. In fact, as the hon. member should know, all ministers of the crown are indemnified for activities that fall within their jurisdiction during their term of office. In fact, all MPs are indemnified under the same circumstances, including some members of the NDP, his colleagues.

I would assure the hon. member that everything is in accordance with Treasury Board guidelines.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' record is one of waste, questionable ethics, and political funding from sources charged with corruption. It is scandal upon scandal.

This week alone, we heard about a high-priced private lawyer who is defending the Prime Minister, then about a former candidate who

[English]

Hon. James Moore: Hey Nathan, your new civility is awesome.

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages has to let the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent put the question.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I said.

There are so many scandals: the former candidate involved in organized crime and the carefully organized influx of donations from SNC-Lavalin. It is starting to be a bit much and it is only Wednesday. What can we expect for tomorrow?

Will the Prime Minister finally put his foot down and create a culture of responsible ethics in his caucus?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is trying to distract us from the fact that the leader of the opposition received a donation directly from the vice-president of SNC-Lavalin.

The New Democrats are asking these kinds of questions because they do not want to talk about the economy, the 700,000 jobs we have created or the tax cuts that have bolstered our economy. That is our agenda, but the NDP members do not want to talk about it because they are afraid of this debate.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Space Agency and the Canadian Space Program are a source of pride for Canadians and have made Canada the third country in space. They have also contributed to the growth and development of a first-rate aerospace industry.

Now, we have learned that the government is going to cut the Canadian Space Agency's budget by 10%.

How could this government, which claims to be the champion of innovation and competitive industry, make such a decision? Why did it make this ill-considered decision?

● (1445)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada plays a key role in the Canadian aerospace industry. Budget 2012 confirms that Canada will continue to participate in the International Space Station mission.

What is more, we are taking concrete action. We launched a review of the aerospace industry and the space sector in general to keep our leadership position. That requires vision. We are giving ourselves the tools we need now to keep this leadership position.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that they are always launching reviews.

[English]

In 2005, the Liberal government undertook a strategic satellite program called the RADARSAT constellation, which is an array of three Earth observation satellites. This was important because it was going to help Canada ensure its security and sovereignty in the far north, in our territorial waters, over our land, and also monitor the rapidly changing environment, particularly in the high Arctic.

Given the fact that MDA, the company that would build the satellites—and remember, we did not allow them to be sold to a foreign company—is waiting for a contract, will the government please tell us whether it intends to proceed with RADARSAT?

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the RADARSAT project and we are working on delivering in a cost-effective way. I wonder how the member will vote on all of these measures.

I want him to know that we launched a review of the aerospace and space sector to make sure that we keep the leadership position in the future.

I wonder where the member was when we launched the \$1.1 billion with respect to science and technology.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the one phrase that describes the Conservative government's military procurement program is sheer incompetence: fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft delayed and over budget, the close combat vehicle procurement slammed by the fairness monitor, the F-35's delay and deceit. Today it is the Arctic patrol ships again delayed and over budget.

Could either minister of defence tell us what it is they do over there?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the 10 years of darkness attributed to the previous Liberal government, we are moving forward on a whole array of assets to support our military men and women in doing their jobs as Canadians expect them to.

As for the Arctic ships, our government is following through on our commitment to build ships in Canada. Irving Shipbuilding is currently building midshore patrol vessels for the Canadian Coast Guard, with the first completed ships expected this year.

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HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister was full of self-congratulation yesterday about the mental health strategy put forward by the Mental Health Commission, then later in the day admitted there was no new money for this strategy. She is dumping responsibility onto already strained provincial health budgets.

Mental health issues take a great toll on our families and on provincial budgets. Now that we finally have a strategy, we should get down to work. Will the minister show some leadership to make sure that the mental health strategy is implemented?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the strategy from the Mental Health Commission of Canada. As the opposition members know, members of the NDP did not support the commission that was established.

Our government will continue to support the provinces and the territories in their efforts. That is why we have committed to a long-term stable funding arrangement that will see health transfers reach record high levels by the end of the decade.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP have called for a mental health strategy for years, but we also know that the government loves to download to the provinces and keep the money. This is just another example of that. The government is starving provinces and territories with its new health care formula that will take away \$31 billion, yet it is asking them to bear the brunt of this new strategy.

Why is the minister putting responsibility on the backs of financially strained provinces? Does she truly want this new strategy to work?

• (1450)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we will continue to provide support to the provinces and territories. We have committed to long-term stable funding for the provinces and territories that will see health transfers increased.

Once we were elected, our government took quick action to establish the Mental Health Commission of Canada, which the member and the party opposite voted against.

We will continue to work with the provinces and territories.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we always support better mental health on this side, but we voted against the Conservatives' budgets because they did not get the job done.

My question is for the Minister of Public Safety.

Yesterday, the minister dashed off a threatening letter to Commissioner Paulson, ordering him to report on provincial efforts to keep records on firearm sales in their own provinces and ordering the RCMP not to co-operate with provincial chief firearms officers.

Why is the minister issuing orders to the arm's-length RCMP? Why is he interfering with provinces that are trying to take action to make their streets safer?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would recommend the reading of the relevant legislation as to the jurisdiction of the Minister of Public Safety in respect to his responsibilities for the RCMP.

However, I might indicate that Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. The Ending the Long-Gun Registry Act did just that. Any action that runs contrary to the will of Canadians as expressed by this Parliament is unacceptable. While I understand that provinces may wish to create a wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, they must do so under lawful authority.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are showing their true colours.

Oral Questions

All we are asking is that the minister stop giving political orders to the RCMP and that he stop interfering in provincial matters. The minister's photo ops may be fine and dandy, but they do not improve security. According to the justice department's reports on plans and priorities, the 2012-13 target for crime reduction is—take a guess—as little as one per cent.

Why does the minister want to prevent the provinces from making their streets safer? Is it in his best interest to maintain the current crime rate?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member has been, but we have been targeting criminals and crime in this country every year for six years. The only thing that has been consistent is the opposition of the NDP and its cronies to every single measure to better protect Canadians. That is their record.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has consistently taken steps to put the rights of victims ahead of the rights of criminals. We are taking strong action to restore balance in the justice system from the bad old days when the Pierre Trudeau government proclaimed that it was time to start putting offenders' rights ahead of public safety.

Could the Minister of Public Safety give the House an update on the steps our government is taking to hold convicted criminals to account?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a good question from the other side.

Today I announced a number of measures to increase offender accountability, including making prison inmates pay a portion of their board and room, eliminating so-called incentive pay, and ensuring costs associated with managing the inmate telephone system are charged to the inmate population. They use it, they pay for it.

Our government always stands up for the rights of victims over the rights of criminals, and in addition, can save the taxpayers \$10 million by this measure on an annual basis.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just as the NDP predicted, the Conservatives' cuts to Veterans Affairs Canada are going to significantly reduce the services provided to the men and women who have bravely served this country. We are talking about the most significant change to that department in Canadian history, with over 800 full-time jobs being eliminated.

At a time when 35,000 soldiers who served in Afghanistan will be eligible for these services, why are the Conservatives so determined to take these resources away from our courageous soldiers?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear. What we are taking away from veterans are the millions of unnecessary transactions for veterans who need our services. We are simply cutting the red tape, cutting the routine and

repetitive tasks that waste paper and in no way serve our veterans. That is what we are doing. If the member really wants to help veterans, he should support budget 2012, because it maintains veterans' benefits.

• (1455)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once services are taken away, it will be impossible for a veteran to actually speak to someone in person.

The government has this theory that veterans' mental health issues can be solved over the Internet or maybe with a long distance phone call, which could be answered by a private company called Quantum, which answers the phone as Veterans Affairs Canada.

Why is the government privatizing veterans services to private companies? Why is it laying off so many front-line people who provide that invaluable service to the heroes of our country?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague to visit the National Centre for Operational Stress Injuries at Ste. Anne's Hospital in Montreal. This centre of excellence is part of a network of clinics. We have doubled the number of clinics. We have people working on the streets to help veterans. The best way to continue providing support for veterans' needs, both physical and mental, is to support budget 2012, which maintains all benefits for veterans.

* * *

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, access to safe food is something Canadians expect and deserve, but if the Conservatives have their way, food safety in the future will be a roll of the dice, with fewer regulations, fewer inspections, and massive cuts to food inspectors. No wonder the Conservatives refused to meet with the UN food rapporteur.

Why are the Conservatives cutting the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and gambling with the health of Canadians?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Canada's food safety is found to be among the best in the world by qualified sources that are constantly adjudicating us.

We are not cutting food safety. What we are doing is refocusing our energy and our abilities to make sure that Canadians continue to enjoy safe food.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know what happens when the government falls short on food safety: listeriosis and E. coli outbreaks.

With fewer standards, fewer inspections and fewer Canadian Food Inspection Agency inspectors, how can Canadians continue to trust the system? We are headed straight for disaster.

Why are the Conservatives launching a direct attack on food safety?

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is new to the file. I would be happy to have the department brief her on any of these issues at any time, should she so desire.

The department will tell her that we have hired over 700 inspectors since we formed government. We have added hundreds of millions of dollars in capacity for CFIA to retrain and recruit new people. Last year we added \$100 million in the budget and this year we have added \$51 million. Every time we add moneys in the budget, the NDP votes against it.

* * *

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when campaigning for the trust of Canadian seniors, the Prime Minister promised not to cut pensions. Then after tricking seniors with false promises, the Prime Minister smiled, shrugged, and reached deeply into their pockets. Seniors believed the Prime Minister when he said that their pensions would be safe with him.

Would someone over there, anyone, stand up and tell Canadians why the Conservatives have such a problem when it comes to telling the truth?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making sure that the old age security system is safe for today's seniors and safe for future generations. To do that we have to make some changes, but those changes will not take effect until 2023. That is when they will start to be phased in.

We have to make sure that Canadians do have access to old age security. That is what we promised. That is what we are going to do for today's seniors and for future generations.

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, alleged widespread Conservative election fraud is a grave matter for Canadians and for the future of our democracy.

It is appalling that this scandal-ridden government is still in denial. Yesterday the parliamentary secretary continued the falsehoods about the tight connection between his party and the Pierre Poutine IP address, and he twisted the Chief Electoral Officer's own words of warning. That is shameful. Canadians deserve better.

When will the Conservative government take our democracy seriously and call a royal commission?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, several statements made by the member opposite are categorically false.

There is no connection between the IP address mentioned by the member and the Conservative Party of Canada, and she knows that full well.

We are working to assist Elections Canada in this matter. I wish the opposition parties would do the same.

* * *

● (1500)

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when confronted with the fact that our credit card payment regime is perverse and subverts market forces, the Minister of Finance pointed to the toothless voluntary code of conduct.

As it stands now, the voluntary code is doing nothing to protect merchants and consumers from paying some of the highest fees in the world, a whopping \$5 billion in hidden fees alone.

Will the minister finally admit that the voluntary code is not working, pledge today to do what other G20 countries have done and implement binding regulations to end these infuriating fees?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to the contrary, the code of conduct is working. It is working because there is compliance by all parties with the code of conduct. They all know full well that if they breach the code, we will move to regulation. They know that and they follow the code. There have been a couple of instances of breach; we have brought them to the relevant parties' attention, and they have corrected it.

The code works. It was created by all parties in the credit card system.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, SMEs and consumers have good reason to be disgusted because, every year, \$5 billion in hidden fees is being taken from Canadians' pockets and given directly to credit card companies. It is completely unacceptable.

Putting an end to excessive credit card interest rates is a simple way to resolve this problem. It would allow these billions of dollars to be reinjected into the economy and would stimulate growth.

Why are the Conservatives allowing consumers and SMEs to be victims of credit card companies' predatory practices?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are disclosure requirements with respect to the interest charged by various credit cards. Different rates of interest are charged by different credit cards, so I encourage consumers in Canada to shop around and choose the credit card they want.

Some credit cards have higher rates of interest; they offer more benefits and points and things like that. Some are more bare bones and have lower rates of interest. It is good for consumers to shop around.

* * *

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, safety in the workplace is a priority for Canadians and it is a priority for this government.

This is North American Occupational Health and Safety Week, giving us an opportunity to focus the attention of employers, employees and the general public on staying safe in the workplace, at home and in the community.

Could the Minister of Labour please share with this House why occupational health and safety is such an important priority for this government and why today's date, May 9, has such great significance?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to ensuring that when workers go to work in the morning, they return home safely.

While it is North American Occupational Health and Safety Week, it is also an important date that marks the 20th anniversary of the tragedy that occurred at Westray Mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia, in the riding of my colleague, the Minister of National Defence.

An entire shift, 26 miners, lost their lives that day, and the lives of their families, friends and community were instantly changed forever. It was this tragedy that ultimately led to the changes in the federal law in order to make it a criminal offence.

* * *

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made piecemeal promises about future changes to foreign investment rules, but 18 months after its potash fiasco, there is still no clear definition of "net benefit" or "national interest" or "strategic asset".

Specifically, in the foreign bid by Glencore to take over Viterra, Canada's biggest grain company, do troubling public allegations against Glencore of past labour abuses, environmental degradation and even criminal matters get investigated in the assessment of net benefit, and how will any promise of a substantive head office in Regina actually get enforced?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first adjudicators of this deal will be the shareholders of Viterra, who will vote sometime in late May, I understand. At the same time, there is the Investment Canada Act that has to be gone through, the

Competition Bureau is looking at different aspects of the act and I can assure the member that the rules and regulations that are in play today are exactly the same that his government used for 13 years.

* * *

● (1505)

HEALTH

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not content with just attacking refugees in their misguided legislation, Conservatives are also slashing temporary health care for vulnerable newcomers. Doctors have called this Conservative move "unfair, unethical and inhumane". These cuts are short-sighted, and experts say they will end up costing Canadians more.

Does the minister even know how much more it will cost in long-term health care expenditures? Will he reverse these punitive and short-sighted cuts?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to refugees, this government is increasing by 20% the number of resettled refugees that we accept from the around the world and increasing by 20% the integration assistance that they get through the refugee assistance program. No government has done more to help those who are facing persecution.

With respect to the interim federal health program, I will say what is unfair and unethical: a health program that gave better benefits to smuggled false asylum claimants than to Canadian seniors who have been paying their taxes their whole lives. With these changes, there will be fairness when it comes to health care.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read the encouraging news today informing Canadians that an increasing number of people are surviving cancer. I am proud of all the work our government has accomplished to inform and support Canadians about how to prevent cancer from occurring in the first place, but we are also doing a lot of work on the research side.

Would the hon. Minister of Health please provide some details to the members of the House on all the good work that is being done?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, for that great question. I would also like to thank the member for Barrie for introducing his bill, Bill C-314, regarding raising awareness for women with dense breast tissue. I hope it will result in more lives being saved.

Our government has invested almost \$1 billion for cancer research since we formed government in 2006. We also renewed our funding commitment over the next five years for the Canadian Partnerships Against Cancer so that it can continue to do the great work that it is doing. Thanks to this, more people are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

*Routine Proceedings***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know the government has identified 142 heavily contaminated sites across Canada. One example is Big Grassy River First Nation on Lake of the Woods in my riding, which is heavily polluted with petroleum hydrocarbons. Eight years ago, the federal budget set aside \$3.5 billion to clean up these sites.

Why has the government spent only a fraction of that money to clean up these toxic and deadly sites in Canada? The Treasury Board says it has been monitoring Big Grassy for five years. When will real action be taken to make Big Grassy River First Nation safe?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and I can assure him that the federal contaminated sites program is still continuing apace, but I would remind him it is designed to attack and remediate the largest contaminated sites across the country. The hundreds of others, are the responsibility of 16 various departments and agencies. I will try to determine for my colleague which one specifically is responsible for the site in question.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is not only cutting hundreds of specialized jobs at Parks Canada, but it intends to make off with Quebec's history by taking away artifacts from the days of Champlain, Frontenac, Beauharnois and Vaudreuil, and even artifacts from the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

The Conservatives want to take away entire pieces of our memory, our identity and our culture by moving everything to Ottawa.

Will the minister drop his plans, listen to the concerns of the National Assembly and keep these objects from our collective heritage in their rightful place, or does he intend to perpetrate a hold-up of Quebec's history?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question.

Our government recognizes how important culture and heritage are to Quebecers. Of course it would be better to keep the artifacts in places where they can be admired by the public, but for now they will remain in storage. Nonetheless, I can assure the hon. member that the collection in question will remain in Quebec.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 60 petitions.

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, reports of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association.

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the joint visit of the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group and the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships held in Djibouti, Republic of Djibouti from November 14-17, 2011.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the 78th Rose-Roth Seminar and the visit of the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Co-operation held in London, Lincoln and Glasgow, United Kingdom from November 21-15, 2011.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum held in Washington, D.C., United States of America from December 5-6, 2011.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, presented on Wednesday, October 19, 2011, be concurred in.

I will be splitting my time.

The first report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans deals with the snow crab industry in the Atlantic provinces and in Quebec. Snow crab is one of the most important species of crab in eastern Canada. It is harvested by fishermen from Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, particularly off the east coast of Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Snow crab is also one of the most valuable fisheries in eastern Canada. In 2008, the landed value of snow crab for the entire Atlantic region was \$356 million, second only to lobster that is valued at around \$600 million, and well ahead of shrimp that is valued at \$258 million.

In 2010, the former minister of fisheries and oceans announced a drastic 63% cut in the snow crab quota. At the time, the minister said this was necessary to deal with the depleting stocks and to ensure long-term conservation. This sudden cut caused fishermen on the east coast a great deal of financial difficulty and raised many questions about fisheries management at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I will speak more to that later.

Routine Proceedings

On April 28, 2010, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans decided to conduct a study on the snow crab industry in Atlantic Canada. We met with scientists and officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We held several hearings in Grande-Rivière, Quebec; Deer Lake, Newfoundland and Labrador; Sydney, Nova Scotia; and Moncton, New Brunswick. The committee also visited two snow crab processing facilities in Quebec and in Louisbourg, Nova Scotia.

This was a thorough study. Through our study, we were able to hear concerns about the management of snow crab in general, as well as very specific concerns. It provided an excellent opportunity for our committee to really get an idea of the issues facing coastal communities.

As noted in the report:

Common issues include the management of the snow crab fishery, and more specifically, DFO's fisheries management decision-making process, the use of available scientific advice, and the timing and the manner of communicating these decisions. In fact, many of the comments we heard could apply to many other fisheries on all coasts of Canada. In all regions, we also heard concerns about harvesting capacity, the need for some form of rationalization, and the current conditions for welcoming new and younger entrants into the fishery.

As well, it was also noted in the report:

Other issues were specific to individual regions. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the committee heard concerns about the price received by fishermen for their catch and how the price is set. A number of comments were made about the relationship between the harvesting and processing sectors, and the level of vertical integration in the fishery. Some witnesses pointed out that alternative models for the industry existed. In Cape Breton our hearings were mostly focused on resource sharing arrangements among traditional and Aboriginal fleets, and core company quota holders. We heard divergent views on ministerial decisions made with respect to these sharing arrangements. Sharing arrangements were also an important topic of discussion at hearings in Moncton.

After our hearings were complete, we spent a great deal of time discussing our final report. The committee provided a report that includes 11 recommendations and I have the report here. It presented the report to the federal government that the committee felt would improve the management of snow crab.

● (1515)

One recommendation that I strongly agree with is recommendation 2, which reads:

That all of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's future fisheries management decisions be based on the precautionary approach when a formal decision-making framework exists, and that in the absence of such a framework, decisions be based on the elementary principle of precaution.

Because of the apparent fisheries management issues in 2009 and 2010, many of the witnesses called for an inquiry on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. For example, the report reads:

According to Mr. Daniel Desbois who represents traditional crab fishermen in CFA 12, DFO's management practices "raise a great many questions as to whether the resource is being managed in the public interest and in a manner that is consistent with new departmental policies and the principles laid out in the Fisheries Act and the Oceans Act".

During our study, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans really had the chance to learn about the hardships faced by the fishing community where appropriate management does not occur, particularly on the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. It was interesting because the officials at DFO said that because snow crab was cyclical, it should be predictable when the stocks would be low

and stated that they "[didn't] think taxpayers should take care of subsidizing the fishery over the low part of the cycle when there are going to be good profits ahead and they have had good profits in the past".

However, this is why it is so important to go to coastal communities to hear their concerns, where we heard a different story. Many fishermen said that they could not afford a low-income year because they faced so many financial obligations. We heard about deckhands and plant workers who would not qualify for employment insurance. We also had the opportunity to hear about the financial strains that many communities in the Gaspé already face with plant closures, downturns in tourism, moratoria and layoffs. We also heard from first nations communities in the region where the results of the cutting of the quota had a severe impact on their economy and their society.

The overall message that we provided to the government in our report is summed up well in our conclusion. I just want to take some time to read this because it really says it well and it is important. It reads:

The Committee believes that the TAC [total allowable catch] reduction in 2010 would likely have been smaller than 63% if the Minister had accepted the advice of her department to reduce the TAC in 2009 instead of maintaining it at the 2008 level. In retrospect, the 2009 decision was considered by some not to be a prudent one with respect to the sustainability of the fishery. Therefore, the Committee wholeheartedly welcomes the application of the precautionary approach to this fishery. That said, the impacts of the 2010 decision, and more broadly of DFO's management of the snow crab resource in recent years, on fishermen, the industry, and communities were far from being negligible. Even though the biology of the snow crab is well known, and a decline in the harvestable resource was expected, it is important to find a better way to prepare for and mitigate the impact of the ups and downs of this cyclical resource on all stakeholders.

While these recommendations that we suggested will not fix the damage that was done to the fishermen and their coastal communities, we believe that this report and the recommendations included in it will help provide guidance to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as well as the minister in future.

● (1520)

On a personal note, I very much enjoyed the trip to the east coast. I found it extremely informative. I was able to talk first hand with fishermen who were affected and who had been working hard for their communities to make a living, not only with respect to snow crab but many other species in which they were involved. However, snow crab was in the report that we looked at and—

The Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the great pleasure to serve for a period of time on the fisheries and oceans committee. I served with my colleague. I know his words are sincere when he talks about it being his first trip to the east coast.

It is a completely different fishery on the east coast than it is on the west coast. I know that it was very informative. What I think he understood, coming back from those hearings, was that the fishermen in the gulf and along the east coast understood fully that the longevity and the strength of that industry was based on sustainability and on conservation. They have taken incredible measures over the years to ensure the resources continue to provide them with a livelihood.

It has been a while since I worked on that report, but the year before the big downturn there had been an allocation, or an exploitation, rate set by the minister on the recommendation of the science that was received from DFO officials. The industry, the processors, felt they needed more product, so they made a plea to the minister at that time. She in turn increased the amount of quota.

Does the member think that—

The Speaker: I have to stop the member there to allow more people to ask questions.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed travelling to the east coast with my hon. colleague and appreciated his input while he was on the committee. We had the opportunity to hear first-hand from fishermen and others involved in the industry. What we clearly heard was that the decision in 2010 by the minister was what triggered this report. It triggered us taking a closer look at why the deep cut had to happen. Against the science and the advice of the department, the minister went ahead and made the 63% cut, which we know could have been avoided had the minister followed the advice of her department.

• (1525)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if DFO had followed what it should have done, is it not true too that maybe a mistake was made by the department last year? When the DFO quota went down, many of the crab fishermen talked about the way the test was done and they challenged the answer from DFO with respect to that. I do not believe DFO doubled up the quota because all of a sudden within one year, from last year to this year, there were more crabs in the sea.

It sounds like, and maybe my colleague remembers, when the salmon appeared in British Columbia. Is it not the same story?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague raises a great point. We are talking about snow crab, but the question about the biomass on all coasts of this province is critical. He points to salmon. In 2009 we had a collapse on the west coast of the Fraser River sockeye run where just over a million salmon returned when usually between 8 million and 20 million were expected. Then in 2010 we had a huge return.

The important factor is science. Science combined with traditional local knowledge is critical. The fishermen can often provide that local knowledge, which is critical for making important decisions, but once that information comes forward, it has to be listened to by the minister.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order pursuant to Standing Order 62. While my friend and colleague, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, just gave an excellent speech, I think all members in this place are very anxious to continue the debate on this important subject. My hon. colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine clearly rose to seek the floor at the same time as the member for Acadie—Bathurst. Perhaps he had difficulty catching your eye.

Pursuant to Standing Order 62 I therefore move:

Routine Proceedings

That the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine be now heard.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1610)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 188)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bellavance	Benskin
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brousseau
Caron	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dusseau	Fortin
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Scott	Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan

Routine Proceedings

Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Tumel— 97

Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Andrews
Ashfield
Baird
Bélanger
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Casey
Chong
Coderre
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Foote
Galipeau
Garneau
Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinty
Menegakis
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Opitz
Paradis
Poilievre
Rae
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Smith

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Benoit
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clement
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Fry
Gallant
Gill
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoepfner
Hsu
Jean
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Krampp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murray
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oliver
Pacetti
Penashue
Preston
Raitt
Regan
Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory

Sopuck
St-Denis
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Sorenson
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trotter
Tweed
Valeriotte
Van Loan
Wallace
Watson
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer— 180

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for giving me the confidence to give this speech.

[*Translation*]

This is an important matter. The Report on the Snow Crab Industry in the Atlantic Provinces and in Quebec is a subject close to my heart.

When I was a miner, my first responsibility as union representative was to travel to the Acadian Peninsula and begin working in the fishing industry to represent the men and women of that industry. Although fishing is seasonal in nature, it was what most people did for a living. At that time, the fishery was in good shape in the Atlantic provinces and in Quebec. People worked up to 35 weeks a year. In the Atlantic provinces, 35 weeks of fishing is a big deal.

I remember that in 1988, the crab stock collapsed. At the time, the quota for crab fishermen was about 30,000 tonnes per year, but because of the collapse, the quota dropped to 7,000 tonnes per year. It was a crisis. I remember that at the time global quotas were introduced, meaning a period during which all fishermen could fish as much as possible.

Some positive steps were taken. For instance, individual quotas were introduced. At the time, each fisher had a quota. Introducing individual quotas helped put an end to overfishing. No one can deny that overfishing was a problem.

Ghost traps were even used in crab fishing. Any hon. members with an interest in the history of that time will learn that fishers put traps in the sea and left them there. Fishers were entitled to a certain number of traps, which were called “ghost traps”. Fishing continued even through the winter. It was year round. If the fishers took the traps out of the sea, they risked getting caught, so they left them in the water. When the traps stayed there over the winter, that was ghost fishing. The crabs entered the traps and could not get out. During the period when fishing was not allowed, the crabs died or ate each other. Then the traps would fill up again.

Routine Proceedings

The individual quotas eradicated the ghost fishing problem. I remember at the time that Fisheries and Oceans Canada issued a directive whereby the fishermen could recover the traps without being arrested, regardless of who those traps belonged to. The fishermen cleaned up the ocean and the bay and it was the best thing that could have happened. Then the quota of the crab biomass increased to a level at which people could make a good living from the crab industry.

After some time, quotas were shared. Indeed, it is contradictory. The traditional fishermen say that it is up to them; that they have worked hard; that they have made sacrifices; that they worked when they were entitled to only 7,000 metric tonnes; and that they went through tough times. Now that they have been assured that the stock is coming back, the fishermen believe it should be theirs alone.

There are communities where people are living in poverty and where the fishery is not doing so well. For example, the cod and groundfish fishery is now closed in Atlantic Canada. At home, in the Acadian Peninsula and in the Gaspé, it is closed. There was quota sharing between the coastal fishermen and the aboriginals. Now, the aboriginal peoples have access to the fishery, which is important.

As my colleagues know, a report was prepared and I was asked to study it. I would like to congratulate our colleagues who visited the regions. It was important to the people. The member for Westminster—Coquit—

An hon. member: New Westminster—Coquitlam

• (1615)

Yvon Godin: I believe that the parliamentary secretary for official languages was right: I am having trouble talking.

The member for New Westminster—Coquitlam voted to let me speak, and I thank him. Furthermore, I would like to congratulate him for coming to our area to talk to the people. It is important for the people to see the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans travelling to the regions. We sometimes live in a bubble here.

Sometimes, the problem is that the Fisheries and Oceans people also live in a bubble. That is one of the problems. Sometimes, the Fisheries and Oceans people do not understand the situation. They do not want to work with the fishermen. That is one of the report's recommendations. The fishermen are asking the Fisheries and Oceans people to come and work with them to find solutions.

The same thing happened with the cod fishery and the groundfish fishery. The fishermen are asking that they be allowed to catch their 20,000 pounds and that they work with the biologists, experts and people who know all about the fishery. These are experienced fishermen. We should put the groups together and let them work together. I can see in the report that this is what the fishermen are asking for.

[*English*]

When we look at this report, that is what the fishermen are saying. They want to work together, to work with the biologists and to work with the fisheries department. They want to be together in this, to be able to do something in the fisheries. They do not want to lose their bread and butter. They want to be able to continue fishing. They do not want to abuse the fishery, taking everything.

Here we are in 2012. The time of abuse is over. The fishermen want to work with the communities. They want to work together. That is what it is saying in this report, "Let us work together. Let us do something together."

I hope the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans hears this and will do exactly that, and that he looks at the recommendations. It is nice to make recommendations, but it does not do any good if they are not acted upon. If he agrees with the recommendations, then the department should act on the report and meet with the fishing communities immediately.

That is what this report says. It is so important to all the fishermen of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Quebec.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

It is important to all of these people to work together for the future rather than have the Department of Fisheries and Oceans fighting with fishermen all the time. That is not what is needed. What is needed is co-operation among these groups. The government's job is to get these people to the table to ensure the future of the fishery and fish stocks. They have to do it together rather than fight with the fishermen. My colleague mentioned that there were 11 recommendations and that they were all very important.

The fishery is important to us. It is sad to hear the government talk as though people in the Atlantic provinces are a bunch of lazy nogoodniks who want to take advantage of employment insurance. I would like to know where the Conservatives would get their lobster and their cod without an Atlantic fishery or a Pacific fishery in the west. I do not know where they would get their tasty lobster and their shrimp.

These are seasonal jobs. The fishing industry deserves respect. Not just anyone can go out and get that kind of food. You cannot get it in Toronto. You cannot fish for cod on Yonge Street in Toronto. You cannot catch lobster on Sainte-Catherine in Montreal. You can catch it in Chaleur Bay, which freezes in winter. Our fishermen deserve a lot of respect.

That is why it is such a shame that the government came up with its 421-page budget bill.

That is why, since all of our problems are being stuffed into one bill, I move, seconded by the member for Trinity—Spadina:

That the House do now adjourn.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

• (1705)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 189)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bellavance	Benskin
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brousseau
Caron	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Côté
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Dusseau
Fortin	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Gravelle	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Pécllet
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scott
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel— 96

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Amblar	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson

Andrews	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Bélanger	Benoit
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Casey	Chisu
Chong	Clement
Coderre	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dion
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Foote	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Garneau	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoepfner
Holder	Hsu
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauson	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayer
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murray
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Oliver	Opitz
Pacetti	Paradis
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Rae
Raitt	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Ritz
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Sgro
Shea	Shipley
Shory (sor)	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	St-Denis
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trottier	Trudeau
Tweed	Uppal
Valeriotte	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wilks
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Williamson	Yelich
Woodworth	

Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 179

Young (Vancouver South)

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

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 Alfred-Pellan, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest, Employment; the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Health.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments about the snow crab and its importance to the Atlantic and Quebec regions.

When I was on the fisheries committee, which produced this report and these recommendations, I had the opportunity to visit different communities in Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. I know my colleague was talking about the impact the science of biomass had on local fishermen in his community and his riding.

Could my colleague perhaps give his comments about the decision the minister made in 2010, which was to make a 63% cut to the quota, and the impact it had on the fishermen in his community? Could he comment about how that could have been prevented or what information is needed in order to prevent those kinds of decisions from happening in the future?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

The impact was not only on fishermen; it was also felt by fish plant workers. A fish plant worker had only about four weeks of work. For the men and women working there, it was their livelihood. That is what really hurt the crab fishing industry.

At the same time, we have to look at how it could have been resolved. The department should have listened to the fishermen. I was speaking to some expert fishermen who had fished for many years, 20 to 30 years, and they knew what the Department of Fisheries was doing was wrong in closing it down to the amount of 8,000 to 9,000 metric tonnes.

The reason for that reduction was based on how one does the tests. Fishermen were telling the department that, but the department would not listen to them. Let us just imagine this: people would take their boats and nets and go out on the water to do the tests. It is not the same thing as looking in the cages themselves, where fishermen catch the crab. They would just take their boats and put their nets in the water, and after that they would pull their nets out to see if there were any crab in the sea.

The department official, who had no experience, would stop his boat, and the crabs were falling out of the net. When he pulled it out, there were no crab. Then the government decided to close it down. Fishermen were telling the minister and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans it was the wrong way to do it.

Routine Proceedings

What did the Department of Fisheries and Oceans do? It completely refused to listen. This is what the fishermen are saying: "Listen to us!"—

The Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question to the hon. member regarding the crab situation.

Over the past several years, we have had a drastic reduction in a vital area of the crab fishery known as 3K. In that area, science has given us what we feel is not a substantial amount of information, yet drastic decisions were taken based on very small amount of science in the 3K area I talked about, and in several other areas on the east coast of this country.

I was wondering if the hon. member could comment. The way we are heading in terms of science and research is that we are basing it over a longer period of time, and it is not only that: the money is just not available.

How can we focus and get the government to say that more importance needs to be given to this particular situation on the east coast, especially when it comes to the snow crab species?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I believe that is the way to do it. Fishermen are saying the same thing: put more money into it. After all, fishing is the livelihood of the Atlantic, part of Quebec and the Magdalen Islands. It is the livelihood of the men and women working in fish plants and everything.

The government just washed its hands. It said it is not going to put any money in it anymore. It should tell the scientists to be with the fishermen and work with them, and not just ignore them and come out with reports that fishermen do not agree with. They should work together with fishermen.

That is what we have suggested to the department and to the minister. The minister has closed his eyes to it. That is why we are in this mess today. These fishermen are so upset over it because they feel they are not part of the decision-making process, and they have experience.

I heard this from an engineer working in a mine: "I am an engineer. I went to university for eight years, but the miners worked in the mines for 30 years. Putting those two together makes 38 years." The same should be done with the fishermen: put them together to work together.

● (1710)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1730)

During the ringing of the bells:

The Speaker: Order, please. At this time and in accordance with past precedents, as stated at page 571 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, I have no choice but to interrupt the bells since the motion that the debate be now adjourned has lapsed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The House resumed from May 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-304, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act (protecting freedom), as reported (with amendment) from the committee, be concurred in.

The Speaker: It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in Bill C-304 at report stage under private members' business.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 190*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bezan	Blaney
Bloch	Boughen
Braid	Breitreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau

Gallant	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauson	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	Menegakis
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Norlock
Moore (Fundy Royal)	O'Neill Gordon
Nicholson	Oliver
O'Connor	Paradis
Obhrai	Poillievre
Opitz	Raitt
Penashue	Reid
Preston	Richards
Rathgeber	Ritz
Rempel	Schellenberger
Richardson	Shipley
Saxton	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Shea	Sopuck
Shory	Stanton
Shorsor	Strahl
Smith	Tilson
Sorenson	Trost
Storseth	Tweed
Sweet	Van Kesteren
Toet	Vellacott
Trottier	Warawa
Uppal	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Van Loan	Wilks
Wallace	Wong
Watson	Yelich
Sky Country)	Young (Vancouver South)
Weston (Saint John)	
Williamson	
Woodworth	
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer — 149	

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brousseau
Casey
Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dion
Donnelly
Dubé
Dusseault
Eyking
Fortin
Garneau
Genest
Giguère

Private Members' Business

Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Martin
Mathysen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Pilon
Quach
Rafferty
Raynault
Rousseau
Savoie
Scott
Sgro
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote — 129

Goodale
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Masse
May
McGuinty
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani
Murray
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Péclet
Plamondon
Rae
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis
Stoffier
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Côté
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dusseault
Galipeau
Genest
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hassainia
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Larose
Laverdière
Leslie
Lizon
Masse
May
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Péclet
Plamondon
Rafferty
Raynault
Sandhu
Scott
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trost
Williamson

Choquette
Christopherson
Comartin
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Donnelly
Dubé
Fortin
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hiebert
Hyer
Julian
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Martin
Mathysen
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani
Nantel
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Pilon
Quach
Ravignat
Rousseau
Savoie
Sellah
Sitsabaiesan
Stoffier
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel
Woodworth — 108

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from May 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (pregnant or nursing employees), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-307 under private members' business.

- (1820)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 191)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brousseau
Caron
Charlton

Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Benoit
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Bruinooge
Cash
Chicoine

Ablonczy
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Andrews
Ashfield
Baird
Bélangier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Casey
Chong
Coderre
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Foote
Gallant
Gill
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper

NAYS

Members

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clement
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Fry
Garneau
Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)

Private Members' Business

Hawn	Hayes	Aglukkaq	Albas
Hillyer	Hoepfner	Albrecht	Alexander
Holder	Hsu	Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
James	Jean	Allison	Ambler
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis	Ambrose	Anders
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Anderson	Andrews
Kent	Kerr	Angus	Armstrong
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Ashfield	Ashton
Lake	Lamoureux	Aspin	Atamanenko
Lauzon	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	Aubin	Ayala
Leef	Leitch	Baird	Bateman
Lemieux	Leung	Bélanger	Bellavance
Lobb	Lukiwski	Benoit	Benskin
Lunney	MacAulay	Bezan	Blanchette
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie	Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Mayes	McCallum	Block	Boivin
McColeman	McGuinty	Borg	Boughen
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Menegakis	Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Merrifield	Miller	Brahmi	Braid
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Breitkreuz	Brosseau
Moore (Fundy Royal)		Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Murray	Nicholson	Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Norlock	O'Connor	Butt	Calandra
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai	Calkins	Cannan
Oliver	Opitz	Carmichael	Caron
Paradis	Penashue	Carrie	Casey
Poillievre	Preston	Cash	Charlton
Rae	Raitt	Chicoine	Chisholm
Rathgeber	Regan	Chisu	Chong
Reid	Rempel	Choquette	Chow
Richards	Richardson	Christopherson	Cleary
Ritz	Saxton	Clement	Coderre
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger	Comartin	Côté
Sgro	Shea	Cullen	Cuzner
Shipley	Shory	Daniel	Davidson
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)		Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Smith		Day	Dechert
Sopuck	Sorenson	Dei Mastro	Devolin
St-Denis	Stanton	Dewar	Dion
Storseth	Strahl	Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Sweet	Tilson	Doré Lefebvre	Dreeschen
Toet	Trottier	Dubé	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Trudeau	Tweed	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dusseault
Uppal	Valeriotte	Dykstra	Easter
Van Kesteren	Van Loan	Eyking	Fantino
Vellacott	Wallace	Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Warawa	Watson	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks	Fletcher	Foote
Wong	Yelich	Fortin	Fry
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)	Galipeau	Gallant
Zimmer— 169		Garneau	Garrison
		Genest	Genest-Jourdain
		Giguère	Gill
		Godin	Goguen
		Goldring	Goodale
		Goodyear	Gosal
		Gourde	Gravelle
		Grewal	Groguhé
		Harper	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
		Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
		Hassainia	Hawn
		Hayes	Hiebert
		Hillyer	Hoepfner
		Holder	Hsu
		Hughes	Hyer
		Jacob	James
		Jean	Julian
		Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
		Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kellway
		Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
		Kerr	Komarnicki
		Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
		Lamoureux	Lapointe
		Larose	Latendresse
		Lauzon	Laverdière
		LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
		Leef	Leitch
		Lemieux	Leslie
		Leung	Liu
		Lizon	Lobb
		Lukiwski	Lunney
		MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
		MacKenzie	Martin
		Masse	Mathysen

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

● (1825)

[Translation]

HOUSING

The House resumed from May 4 consideration of Motion M-331.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion M-331 under private members' business.

● (1830)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 192)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy

Adams

Private Members' Business

May	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis	Merrifield
Michaud	Miller
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nicholson
Norlock	Nunez-Melo
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Obhrai	Oliver
Opitz	Pacetti
Papillon	Paradis
Patry	Péclet
Penashue	Pilon
Plamondon	Poilievre
Preston	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Raitt	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Ritz
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
St-Denis	Stanton
Stewart	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sullivan	Sweet
Thibeault	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Trudeau
Turmel	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriote
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 278

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

BREAST DENSITY AWARENESS ACT

The House resumed from May 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-314, An Act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-314 under private members' business.

● (1840)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 193)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Angus	Armstrong
Ashfield	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Baird	Bateman
Bélangier	Benoit
Benskin	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Blaney	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brosseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Caron	Carrie
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Clement
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dreeschen	Dubé
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseau	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Foote	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Gameau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Godin	Goguen
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Gravelle
Grewal	Grogulé
Harper	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hassainia	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoepfner
Holder	Hsu
Hughes	Hyder
Jacob	James
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kellway
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent

Private Members' Business

Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Lauzon	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leslie
Leung	Liu
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Martin
Masse	Mathyssen
May	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis	Merrifield
Michaud	Miller
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nicholson	Norlock
Nunez-Melo	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oliver	Opitz
Pacetti	Papillon
Paradis	Patry
Péclet	Penashue
Pilon	Poilievre
Preston	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Raitt	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Ritz
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
St-Denis	Stanton
Stewart	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sullivan	Sweet
Thibeault	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Trudeau
Turnel	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriotte
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 274

NAYS

Members

Fortin
Plamondon— 4

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 26, we introduced the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity bill and on the same day we indicated we would have the second reading vote on the bill on May 14. As part of the fair process we have set out for the bill, this vote will follow the longest debate on a budget implementation bill in at least the last two decades. We will keep our commitment.

Given the events of today, I would like to advise the House of a change in the designation for the next allotted day. It will now be Wednesday, May 16.

Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to Question No. 549 on the order paper.

The Speaker: It being 6:40 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from March 15 consideration of Bill C-316, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (incarceration), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas has five and a half minutes left for his remarks.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise to finish off my speech that I started some weeks ago.

We are again talking about the private member's bill brought forward by the member for Cariboo—Prince George which proposes to reform the EI system. It is a good idea to look at reforming the EI system, but unfortunately I do not agree with this legislation.

As I was saying weeks ago, when looking at a private member's bill we should be thinking about how it would affect the entire community rather than just one segment of the community. We have to think about whether it would make the entire community better or worse off. Unfortunately this legislation would make the community worse off.

I explained previously why I think that but I will reiterate it again here tonight. These changes would remove training opportunities from those who could really benefit from them, training opportunities that would prevent people from pursuing the wrong track of life, or training opportunities that would move them back into the mainstream where they can become productive. This legislation is not worth supporting at this point.

In case members are not following *Hansard* and paying attention to my every word, I will remind them of what I said in my speech a month ago.

Private Members' Business

Although I proudly represent beautiful Burnaby, British Columbia, I grew up in rural Nova Scotia in an area where there was really not much opportunity for folks and times were tough. I had a lot of friends. Some went down the right path but some went down the wrong path. After going down the right path myself, I found that no matter how hard I tried I could not get a job. I found myself on unemployment insurance, as it was called then.

At that time, job training was provided. People were placed in a workplace where they would receive training. That really changed my life. Working with a business and eventually a municipality, I became interested in local government and doing things for the community. I was able to gain some practical skills and knowledge about how a local government worked. That really piqued my interest in municipal government. All of that came from an unemployment insurance training program.

Through that process I met a number of people who took the wrong path and were incarcerated. They managed to receive EI and then get into the training programs—

● (1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. There is too much noise in the chamber. We are in the middle of private members' business so I would ask all hon. members who wish to carry on conversations to please take their leave to their respective lobbies.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, having followed the right track and gone through this training program myself, I saw how those who had taken the wrong track were exposed to new opportunities through these training programs. I am really worried that the changes in the bill to the Employment Insurance Act which would limit people from these programs would be problematic.

I was in a program where I gained skills. I had good mentorship from people in municipalities, and I became interested in local issues. Not to toot my own horn, but that prompted me to go back to university where I received a bachelor's degree then a master's degree and eventually a Ph.D. I became tenured.

I am not saying that these programs lead to those kind of career paths. However, they do give people a chance to do something different and a chance to look at life in a different way. If we take away that opportunity, as the bill would do for some, that would not contribute to the community as a whole.

There is a lot of value in communities looking at how they treat people. Some people who do bad things in a community should be kept away from the community. But the changes suggested in the legislation would punish people who have done minor things, people who have had some problems at home or were at loose ends and not sure what direction to take, often young people. They then go down the wrong path and are continually punished.

We heard today how those who are incarcerated may have to pay even more money. We should not be marginalizing people in the community. We should be bringing the community together. My grandfathers, one a gunsmith and the other an Anglican priest, taught me that lesson. They managed to get along and we should perhaps be doing the same. We should be bringing communities together. We

should not be bringing forward punitive measures that would hurt and divide communities.

I do not support Bill C-316.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I adamantly oppose this bill, Bill C-316, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (incarceration).

This bill aims to amend EI qualifying provisions to deny those found guilty of an offence access to employment insurance. Current provisions already allow for the qualification period to be extended if the claimant has spent fewer than two years incarcerated. Those incarcerated for fewer than two years are not hardened criminals. These are people who can be rehabilitated. When they are released from incarceration, they have paid their debt to society. If one thinks about it, incarceration is the penalty levied by the court.

Now the government wants to make them pay twice. I find it is a bit of an overkill. It is a bit cruel and punitive. Many of those incarcerated for fewer than two years are often incarcerated for “poverty related crimes”. For instance, approximately 40,000 Canadians are in provincial corrections facilities at any given time for failure to pay a fine. Imposing fines under provincial acts does not take into account people's ability to pay, and often leads to reoffending and doing more time for the same crime. It becomes a vicious cycle. People cannot afford to pay, so they go into jail, they lose their job, they come back out and they cannot afford to pay fines again.

Three per cent of all people in custody in provincial or territorial institutions, in 2008-09, were incarcerated for failure to pay a fine, women and first nations in particular. According to the 2011 National Council of Welfare report, *The Dollars and Sense of Solving Poverty*, 80% of incarcerated Canadian women are there for poverty related crimes; 39% of those for failure to pay a fine.

Seventy per cent of incarcerated women are single mothers struggling with the high cost of living and trying to feed their families. As a result, crimes of desperation are often committed. Many of them have families for whom they are the sole breadwinner. Many have absolutely no choice because they do not have the skills and education to find well-paying jobs.

The United Way of Calgary, in a report in 2008, called *Crimes of Desperation*, said that, “Incarcerating a woman for a poverty-related crime does punish her”. The report points out that the punishment is for being poor and trying to cope “by using a socially inappropriate but readily available means”. Such means would include stealing or doing whatever she needs to do to get some food on the table. The report suggests that, “Given this, the rates of re-offence are significant and costly”.

Private Members' Business

The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George noted in committee that he does not understand how people cannot afford to pay a fine. I think this really only underscores a fact about how out of touch the government and the hon. member are with people who actually live in poverty and who commit crimes of desperation.

It is likely that these individuals, who already have limited incomes before they went into prison, have a hard time getting a job when they come out because of the stigma attached to being in jail. That is a double whammy for these people. Again, researchers found that ex-prisoners who are able to find legitimate jobs are less likely to reoffend than ex-prisoners who do not find jobs.

Employment insurance is not a perk. It is there to assist in the transition to employment. It is not a handout. EI is something one has to pay into in order to be eligible. We are therefore only speaking of people who are eligible who should have access to EI when they get out of prison. Without this insurance, these individuals may end up on welfare. I want to stress this: EI benefits are currently only payable to ex-prisoners upon their release if they are eligible.

This bill is a penalty on top of a court-ordered penalty. Our correctional institutions are not, as the government thinks, the answer to housing, mental illness, homelessness and addiction. They are rehabilitation centres, particularly for those offenders who are incarcerated for fewer than two years. If one believes prisoners can and should be rehabilitated to become positive contributors to our society, then one will agree that support programs both inside and outside the prison system will help them be able to live meaningful lives again.

● (1850)

Finding a legitimate productive job is one of the best ways to ensure an ex-prisoner does not reoffend because of poverty. EI is that bridge that helps them to get there.

I want to say that I oppose this bill. I think it is punitive and unnecessary. I am really sorry to see that it is even being discussed here in the House.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise as the sponsor of this private member's bill, C-316, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (incarceration).

The opposition members have tried to go a lot of different ways to take the focus off the real purpose of the bill. They have tried to make their presentations a little more believable or palatable as they oppose it. They are getting away from the fundamental purpose of the bill, that is, to take away the favourable treatment under the Employment Insurance Act that a convicted felon has over hard-working Canadians who would find themselves in the same circumstances having to apply for EI.

Let me give an example. We will take person A. Person A has been working for a couple of years and makes a decision to break the law, goes to court, gets convicted, and spends a year in jail. I know that some of the members over there do not understand this. Person A spends 12 months in jail, comes out, goes to work for a couple of months, maybe gets laid off and applies for EI. Under EI, he or she would have had to have worked in the previous 12 months, but in reality he or she only worked for two months.

This is where it is unfair. The year that person A spent in prison is as if it had never existed. It never existed that he or she went to jail for a year because the EI Act says that the period from the time person A was convicted until his or her time of release is wiped out. Whatever he or she did after getting out of prison is just added on to the period he or she had worked before. Therefore, that convicted felon could apply for EI and get it because he or she has had that extension.

Here is person B. This is a true story. This is a young lady who has been working for four or five years and paying EI premiums. She finds that her skill levels put in jeopardy her ability to continue working without fear of being laid off. She makes a personal decision to leave her job and go into a year's training to get an upgraded certification, which she pays for herself. She completes that training. With her certificate she gets a new job that pays better money and has more opportunity. She works for two months. The company she works for has some financial problems and she gets laid off. She goes to EI to collect employment insurance and is told that she does not qualify because she did not work in the previous 12 months.

That is not fair at all. That is what this bill is all about. It is not about penalizing. It is about bringing a sense of fairness to the act. That is the essence of this bill.

If this bill is passed it will change the provision which allows convicted offenders to receive extensions in their EI qualification period and their EI benefit collection period. They can add a year on either side. The average Canadian cannot do that.

Our government believes, and I support, that the right to an extension should be provided only to Canadians who deserve it. It should not be available to convicted felons who become incarcerated. Members must remember that nobody just breaks the law by accident. The culpability lies with the person who commits the act. There are penalties to pay. They pay the penalty. That is fine. They come out and they have paid their penalty to society.

● (1855)

However, they should not be rewarded under the EI Act and given more favourable treatment than ordinary working Canadians who may find themselves in a similar set of circumstances, except for the prison.

As well, convicted felons can double the qualifying period when hours are counted to determine benefits or they can double the period for which benefits are taken. The average hard-working Canadian simply cannot do that.

As the act now stands, these conditions are certainly more favourable to the released offender than they are to a majority of EI claimants, and that is most unfair. That is what the bill is all about. We could nickname the bill the EI fairness bill to bring fairness to the EI system.

Private Members' Business

Under the standard system of EI rules, for law-abiding citizens to be eligible for EI benefits they must have paid premiums while they were working, they must be available for work and they must have accumulated a certain number of hours work within the qualifying period. I want to go over this again just so folks get it. People must have worked within the qualifying period, which is normally 52 weeks, before they lost their job through no fault of their own. That means, generally speaking, if they have been out of work for more than 52 weeks they are not eligible to receive EI benefits. Those are regular hard-working Canadians who lose their job through no fault of their own.

These same rules do not apply to someone who has been working, commits a crime and goes to jail. The rules are much better for them than they are for the first person I described.

The EI program does make exception for people who are not able to accumulate the required number of hours within the 52 week qualifying period because of circumstances beyond their control, not because they committed a crime and went to jail. That was within their control. These are circumstances beyond their control. The EI program will extend the qualifying period for up to two years for people who cannot work because of special circumstances beyond their control, such as pregnancy, illness, injury or quarantine.

After an EI claim is established, a person normally has 52 weeks to collect the benefits. This is referred to as the "benefit period" and may be extended to deserving people up to 104 weeks for similar reasons that I have just mentioned.

Qualifying and benefit extensions apply to both regular and specific benefits, which are maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits.

Under the current act, claimants may also have their qualifying or benefit period extended beyond the usual 52 weeks for each week they are confined in a jail, in a penitentiary or a similar situation. The EI Act puts in the same box people who have had circumstances beyond their control, such as pregnancy, illness, injury or quarantine, in the same category, the EI Act unfairly puts them in with a convicted felon who goes to jail. Now that just does not seem right.

Do members know what? Since the bill was introduced, I have had so many calls asking what the bill is all about. When I explain the bill to folks and tell them about the favouritism that a convicted felon gets over a hard-working Canadian, the most common response is, "You've got to be kidding. I could not imagine that provision exists for someone who commits a crime and goes to jail". They say, "Well, good for you. Get your bill through and we'll take that out of there".

What we are trying to do with Bill C-316 is get rid of the favouritism that is extended to convicted felons and we want to bring some fairness back to the way people qualify and receive benefits if they are unable to work.

- (1900)

It is very simple and I ask all members in the House to support the bill because it is really important.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise today to say, on behalf of the NDP, that we completely refuse to support Bill C-316.

It is not favourable treatment, as the hon. member said. A prisoner who is serving a sentence of less than 52 weeks is there because of a minor crime. He is not there because he killed someone or committed a major crime. He is in prison for a minor offence.

Suppose the person worked for 15 years and was then sentenced to less than 52 weeks in prison for committing a minor crime. Under the current legislation, that person can claim employment insurance benefits when he gets out of prison because he has to return to society. Suppose that person served a sentence of 30 weeks in prison. He has to return to society.

How would such a person reintegrate into society? How would he go about looking for employment? How would he approach different workers in a small or large business, depending on his occupation and training? This person was in prison for a certain period of time and therefore has to reintegrate into society. In all likelihood, he will have a lot of difficulty doing so because people do not want to have anything to do with former inmates.

Someone getting out of prison receives EI benefits in exactly the same way as everyone else who is entitled to receive EI benefits after having worked for a certain amount of time, and this period during which he receives benefits will allow him to find a job and return to society.

If this person is not given this time to reintegrate into society, he will not be able to earn a living and there is a good chance he will return to petty crime, which would only send him back to prison. This person, therefore, has a right to a period of EI benefits.

This bill would repeal the provisions that extend the EI qualifying period and the payment of EI benefits to a claimant who has been in jail or prison or any establishment of that sort. This is completely discriminatory and does nothing to address the real flaws in the Employment Insurance Act.

To understand the negative impact of these amendments to the Employment Insurance Act, we have to look at the facts.

Currently, the legislation stipulates that where a person proves that the person was not employed in insurable employment for one or more weeks during the qualifying period because the person was confined in a jail, penitentiary or other similar institution, that qualifying period is extended by the same number of weeks during which he or she was detained and was thus unavailable for work, to a maximum extension of 52 weeks. The maximum qualifying period, as we know, is 104 weeks.

Private Members' Business

Having spent 52 weeks in prison, a person applies and is entitled to 52 weeks. All the other measures are applied as well, but it depends on the unemployment rate in the region and the number of weeks worked before going to prison. This measure does not, of course, apply to inmates who are detained for more than a year.

I want to come back to the story of the woman who prompted the hon. member to introduce this bill. She went to the member's riding office and told him her story. She told him that she went back to school after having worked for 15 years. Then, when she was looking for work, she became sick and was diagnosed with cancer. She went back to see her MP to find out whether she could get employment insurance benefits.

Two wrongs do not make a right.

Instead of dealing with the woman's request properly and helping her find a solution, and instead of introducing a bill to amend employment insurance, the member combed through the bill for something else he did not like. He discovered that a prisoner can have spent time in jail, be released, claim employment insurance and be entitled to receive it. The member figured that was not fair, but the two scenarios have nothing to do with each other. As I said, two wrongs do not make a right. The two have nothing to do with each other. He is mixing up two completely different issues.

What the member should have done was introduce an amendment to the bill to enable the woman to collect sickness benefits during her cancer treatment, then, once she recovers, to collect employment insurance benefits so that she can reintegrate into society because she is unable to work.

It is abundantly clear that this bill is a badly disguised attempt to further restrict access to employment insurance for people who have paid into the system, and this at a time when fewer Canadians than ever before are eligible.

● (1905)

Furthermore, if these former inmates are denied employment insurance to help them get out of the cycle of poverty and petty crime, they will be forced to turn to social assistance.

This downloads the cost onto the provinces, and the provinces will have to foot the bill when these people are released, if they are not given access to employment insurance.

When I first became aware of Bill C-316, my first thought was this: who on this planet could possibly oppose the rehabilitation of our most vulnerable citizens? Who could possibly oppose the rapid reintegration of people into the labour market?

When he appeared before the committee, the member for Cariboo—Prince George explained what led him to create his bill. During his testimony, the member said he had been informed of an unfortunate situation facing one of his constituents, as I said earlier.

As he was reading the legislation to try to help his constituent, the member for Cariboo—Prince George learned of the measures that are available to inmates and he was outraged.

It should come as no surprise that I do not believe that this way of doing things serves any purpose or is constructive in any way. A

society makes progress by constantly improving its legislation and not by regressing and bullying more and more people.

The Employment Insurance Act does have shortcomings that this government should hasten to address in order to make the system more accessible and fair for everyone, particularly for unfortunate people such as the one we just spoke about or for women who lose their jobs when they return from maternity leave.

What is even worse is not that the government is doing absolutely nothing to resolve the shortcomings in this legislation and to help Canadians; the worst thing is that this government prefers inflict more pain on other people who have certain rights.

Why not find positive solutions and introduce a bill that would extend the qualifying period and the benefit period for people who are not covered under the current legislation, such as the woman who wanted to upgrade her skills but fell ill?

In the end, we must simply conclude that, when people go to a Conservative office to ask for help, they come away empty-handed. I am certain that the woman who, one day, asked for help from her Conservative member was not thrilled to see that this government has done nothing to resolve her problem and that it now wants to do away with the special provision for inmates—in the interest of fairness, or so it claims.

In his testimony in committee, again to explain the merits of his bill, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George said that it was completely unfair to grant favouritism to someone who has committed a crime but not to someone who has gone back to school to upgrade her skills.

I would like to remind the House that this information is false and borders dangerously on misinformation. Inmates are not granted any favouritism when they receive employment insurance benefits. They are simply on standby to receive their benefits because they worked before going to prison.

If the inmate is eligible for benefits, it is because he—out of his own pocket—and his employer contributed enough to the employment insurance plan for a specified period of weeks.

If a person who wants to upgrade his skills or go back to school in order to enter the labour market falls ill, then that person does not have access to employment insurance benefits because he did not contribute to the plan for the number of weeks or hours required. It has nothing to do with the fact that the person was an inmate but everything to do with whether that person worked the number of weeks required to be eligible.

It is important to remember that when a law is amended it must be amended for the better.

● (1910)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on Motion No. 1. A vote on this motion also applies to Motions Nos. 2 to 5. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 98 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 16, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 8, 2012, I rose in the House to ask the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism about the very worrisome situation at the Laval immigration holding centre, which is in my riding of Alfred-Pellan.

I was not satisfied with the answer and therefore I thank you for giving me the opportunity to again speak about this matter in the House today.

Things have happened since the last time we discussed this matter. In fact, Bill C-4, the subject of my question, has now been replaced by Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act.

There are three immigration holding centres in Canada: one in Toronto, one in Vancouver and one in Laval, in my riding. Refugees who cannot prove their identity are incarcerated in this facility, which looks like a prison. In fact, in Laval, the centre is located in a former penitentiary. Detainees are put in chains when they are moved and they are separated from their families.

The centre tells the refugees that the process for verifying their identity will take just a few days, but some will spend weeks, even months, at a place that operates as a medium security prison. It is terrible because, contrary to what the government believes,

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newcomers and refugees are not criminals and should not be treated as such.

Studies show that such prison stays will have adverse psychological effects on these individuals. Newcomers in these refugee centres are not entitled to access to psychotherapists or consultations with social workers. In fact, individuals with behavioural problems or suicidal individuals are transferred to a maximum security prison or are simply separated from the others.

This brings me to a number of questions. Is this the federal government's roundabout way of limiting immigration and the number of refugees in Canada?

We are talking about individuals who have left everything behind in their country of origin, in order to find refuge and to emigrate to Canada, a welcoming and developed country. I would like the government to put itself in their shoes for a minute. It must be awful to leave one's country for safety reasons and arrive at a place thinking it will be a welcoming land, only to quickly realize that you are given the same status as a criminal.

Some people prefer to suffer and put up with the pain rather than go to a hospital in chains.

Allow me to ask you a question: is there an emotion that hurts more than physical pain? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is humiliation. No one should be humiliated. However, that is what happens to new immigrants in these immigration detention centres. That is simply unacceptable.

We have learned that the government plans to make cuts of \$84.3 million, or 5.3%, by 2015, and that includes a 13.1% cut to the Immigration and Refugee Board. We wonder how the government plans to remedy this situation. Passing bills such as Bill C-31 and making these types of cuts will stretch immigration processing from a few months to several years.

Why is the government doing nothing to remedy this situation, which is unbearable for newcomers? When will the government get down to work and suggest some real solutions?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

Let me be clear in outlining the circumstances that would lead to someone being detained when the person arrives in Canada. First, if officials suspect that someone is a criminal, has committed crimes against humanity, is a war criminal, or otherwise poses a threat to the safety and security of Canadians, that person will be detained.

Second, under Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, anyone who arrives as part of a human smuggling event will be detained once that person arrives in Canada, except for anyone under the age of 16, who is exempt from detention. The reason is that they often do not have correct documentation.

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It is important to also point out that the architects of the human smuggling events are also on the boats, among everyone else. Accordingly, it is important to detain these individuals until their identity is discovered and verified and their risk to the safety and security of Canadians is verified.

I think detaining foreign nationals for these reasons is what any responsible government would do. I know my constituents sleep better at night knowing that these people are detained and that our Conservative government takes the safety of their families seriously.

Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for the NDP. Surely the NDP is not saying that it wants these people to be let free into our communities, among our constituents and theirs, before we know if they pose a threat. The NDP claims it wants people to be released more quickly, but yet again the NDP has shown that it says one thing and does another.

Under Bill C-31, the refugee determination process will be streamlined, resulting in genuine refugees receiving Canada's protection more quickly while criminals and refugee claimants will be removed faster.

The current refugee determination process takes almost two years for the first hearing. Under Bill C-31, it will take only two to three months for a first hearing. This means that anyone who is detained as part of a human smuggling event and found not to be a risk will not have to wait two years to have their claim heard and be released. Instead, anyone who arrives and is found not to be risk and found to be a bona fide refugee will be released in a few short months.

In addition, in response to the concerns raised by this NDP member's colleagues and experts, our government has acted in good faith and agreed to provisions to add additional detention reviews to Bill C-31. This means even more opportunity for those who have come as part of a human smuggling event.

Unfortunately, the NDP has criticized these important amendments. Instead of working collaboratively and being practical, the NDP has decided to oppose and be ideological. This is very unfortunate, but it is not surprising, because the NDP has a habit of complaining; then, when the government acts to work with the NDP to fix a problem, the NDP does not support it.

I urge the member for take her own advice, work with our government to improve the detention provisions in Bill C-31 and support this very important piece of legislation.

• (1920)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, what is surprising is seeing the parliamentary secretary confusing “criminals” and “refugees”. We are talking about refugees who are incarcerated, families who arrive with young children. The men and women are separated. They are treated like real criminals and are imprisoned. They sleep in dormitories. It is appalling.

I do not know if the parliamentary secretary has ever gone to visit one of these immigration detention centres. I pass by one of these centres every day when I am in my riding, for it is not far from my house. Armed security guards from the Canada Border Services

Agency patrol the roof. People come out of there with their wrists and ankles shackled.

These situations are completely unacceptable considering what these people have been through in their own countries. It is absolutely appalling to think that, as a G8 country, Canada would treat people who come here seeking refuge as common criminals.

I therefore ask the parliamentary secretary why she is confusing refugee families, people who arrive here in good faith, with criminals. Does she not understand the difference between the two?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's position that those who have been found to be a risk to the safety and security of Canadians or whose risk has not yet been determined be released from detention or onto the street is incredibly irresponsible.

I know my constituents do not agree with that position, and I hope the member's constituents are listening closely, because I doubt they support this position either.

Our government has taken reasonable measures to ensure that people are detained when there is a justifiable reason, and we do not apologize for that. What is more, when the NDP has a chance to vote for reasonable measures that will streamline processes and result in people who have been determined to not be a risk being released from detention more quickly, the NDP members vote against them, proof yet again that the NDP says one thing but does another, and proof again that the NDP is not fit to govern.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about saying one thing and doing the other. If members remember, the Conservatives said nothing about changing OAS and the age of retirement, yet they did just that.

On February 13, I rose in the House and asked when the government would introduce a jobs plan for Canadian families. We are talking about families who have a hard time making ends meet and who struggle to pay the rent and buy groceries.

I asked specifically about when the government would help the people of Toronto. I asked the question in light of a study showing that Toronto is a place of skyrocketing costs. The study also showed that Toronto has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country and described how many of the unemployed simply lose hope and give up. This is absolutely unacceptable.

Many Canadians are hurting, but by way of a response to my questions, I got a bunch of Conservative double-talk, faulty numbers and an absence of hope. However, I, as well as many Canadians, knew at that time that the Conservatives' budget had yet to be introduced, and we were hopeful that there would be something for struggling families in Toronto.

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We are hopeful that the government will do what a government is supposed to do: help those it is supposed to serve. We were all hopeful that the government would introduce real initiatives to help Canadian families by providing such things as a jobs plan, a national housing strategy and a national transit strategy; instead the government introduced a 425-page Trojan Horse, a political tool used to change laws out of sight of the public and accountability.

While the Conservatives were focusing on their so-called budget and on cynical parliamentary tricks, they failed to take the time to introduce one measure to help Canadian families make ends meet.

Where is the jobs plan that would help Canadians gain some measure of security and help many more re-enter and maintain their participation in the economy?

•(1925)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Scarborough Southwest on the state of Canadian families.

Child poverty rates have been cut by almost half since 1996. That represents solid, incremental change for the better. This success does not come about by accident. No, it comes from the strong leadership of our Prime Minister and his unwavering, intentional support of families. Our government has been quite clear that we firmly believe that families are the building blocks of Canadian society. Since 2006, the many actions our Conservative government has taken to support Canadian families have meant that the average family of four will save over \$3,000 per year in taxes.

Let me provide a few examples of how our government has provided support for Canadian families.

First and foremost, our government provided choice for parents in child care when we implemented our 2006 campaign promise and brought in the universal child care benefit. This direct payment to Canadian parents provides about \$2.6 billion each year to 1.5 million families and has lifted an estimated 55,000 children and 24,000 families out of low income.

Budget 2007 introduced the child tax credit, which provides tax relief to families with children under the age of 18. Budget 2009 and budget 2010 included additional investments for Canadian families, including improvements to child benefits.

Budget 2010 improved the taxation of the universal child care benefit to ensure that single-parent families received tax treatment comparable to two-parent families. It also allowed parents with joint custody to split child benefits equally throughout the year when a child lives in both households.

In 2011-12, the federal government is providing over \$6 billion in support for early childhood development and child care through transfers to the provinces and territories. This is the largest single investment of its kind in the history of Canada.

In 2011, about 1.5 million working Canadian families are expected to benefit from the working income tax benefit. Our government is working on behalf of Canadian families.

Every action that is taken to improve the strength of families is in the interest of building a better Canada for our next generation of Canadians. No government in Canadian history has been as focused on the well-being of families and on ensuring that they are not unduly burdened by job-killing taxes or social programs that are inflexible and do not provide choice to parents.

Sadly, we have seen the opposition vote against these measures time and time again. Why will the opposition not support our efforts to support Canadian families?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, while the parliamentary secretary gave an answer, if she had bothered to have enough respect for the people of Toronto to actually listen to the question instead of speaking to her neighbour, she would have heard that I was asking about a jobs plan, not about early childhood education.

However, while we are talking about it, the child tax credit certainly does not—

•(1930)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We will allow some additional time for the hon. member, but I want to remind the hon. member that it is the normal practice that we do not make reference to a member's absence or presence in the chamber in the normal course of debate. We will start again, and the member will be allowed the time accorded by the adjournment debate rules, as he normally would have had.

The hon. member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Dan Harris: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I was making reference to the fact that the member was not paying attention.

I was asking about a jobs plan. That is really what is missing from the government's plan. Hundreds of thousands of unemployed Canadians are looking for work. As I mentioned in my statement a few minutes ago, many people have given up that job search. They have lost hope. They have stepped out of looking for jobs, which is certainly not helping the Canadian economy. It is not helping families to succeed. Yet, the government members do not even have the respect for Canadians, for Torontonians, or for other members of the House to actually pay attention when we are asking a question.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary why she does not have enough respect to actually listen to the questions being asked.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. The best way to escape poverty is to have a job. That is why this government has created over 700,000 net new jobs since the downturn of the economy. Our government provides almost \$2.5 billion each year to provinces and territories to enable the delivery of critical services and supports to Canadian workers who need help making the transition to a new job. We also recognize that families are the most important building block of society. Our government provides over \$14 billion per year to benefit families with children.

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I should also state something specifically about the poverty rate which the member opposite has offered. The poverty rate for children has almost halved in recent years. The rate peaked at 18.4% in 1996 under the Liberal government and dropped to under 9.5% in 2009. We have also seen improved living conditions for these families who continue to live below the poverty line. We have made real progress in reducing poverty by providing jobs for Canadians.

HEALTH

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on what the member has just said. The jobs that she talks about certainly will not cover the job losses that the Conservatives are going to add.

With respect to the issue I wish to talk about today, I hope to impress on the government that there is still work to do with respect to addiction in first nations communities. As the remainder of the black market OxyContin works its way through our first nations communities, there is still an opportunity for the government to assume its role seriously as the primary provider of health care for our first nations people. Once again, I will try to impress on the government that the way to deal with the problem is not by turning off the taps and adhering to a narrow ideological view.

[*Translation*]

Finally, I am also calling on the government to take action with regard to addictions, to treat them as seriously as it has treated other public health crises, such as H1N1.

[*English*]

In March, I asked what the government planned to do about the looming crisis that would hit places like Cat Lake First Nation, which was reporting an addiction rate of 70% to the drug which was being phased out. We know that the government had been warned time and again about the problem that was only growing in many first nations communities. I was merely repeating calls that had been made, very publicly, by officials of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Chief Stan Beardy spoke honestly about the incredible rate of OxyContin addiction in northwestern Ontario. Despite the many warnings, the government sat on its hands. Health Canada only addressed the issue of legitimate prescriptions and not addiction.

Addiction is a moral issue. It is an issue as old as civilization. It will not bend to opinion. There are moral issues that attach themselves to addiction. Crime, violence and abuse are the obvious ones. However, at the very heart of the matter, it is an issue of health. The problems that lead to addiction will not disappear with the OxyContin supply. It is just not that easy. We know that when one drug supply dries up, those addicted look for other substances to fill the void.

In the current budget, there were significant cuts to agencies that could have helped deal with the issue of first nations' addictions.

I believe it is time for the government to consider the advice of Dr. Claudette Chase, a family doctor working in northern Ontario, who says that we need to treat the epidemic as if it is an epidemic. When it was H1N1, there were extra nurses and flu clinics all over the north. That model could be used again to stem the tide and help in the recovery process for those who are addicted.

In March, the Minister of Health accused me of fearmongering, leading many to wonder if the Conservative government would rather play petty partisan games or was actually that far out of touch.

I will ask again, will the government finally get off its hands and help our first nations communities deal with addiction?

• (1935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about our concerns regarding the abuse of prescription drugs in first nations communities.

[*English*]

I know that members of this House are also concerned about this issue. Our government takes the misuse of prescription drugs seriously. That is why we are working with other health partners to develop a targeted strategy to address this problem.

A few first nations communities struggle with various kinds of addictions. However, first nations leaders and communities are expressing particular concern over the ripple effects from the recent decision by Purdue Pharma to cease distribution of OxyContin and replace it with OxyNEO. The reason behind this is that, unlike OxyContin, OxyNEO cannot be abused as the capsule is in a gel form.

Through the non-insured health benefits, NIHB, program, we will continue to ensure that first nations and Inuit clients who received coverage for OxyContin during the three months prior to February 15 will continue to receive coverage for OxyNEO. Any new requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and coverage may be granted in exceptional circumstances, such as for individuals with cancer or palliative pain.

Changes to the listing status of long-acting oxycodone under the NIHB program are consistent with the changes made in the public drug plans for the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Some individuals who obtained OxyContin illegally or through multiple sources may experience withdrawal if it becomes harder to obtain OxyContin.

Department officials from Health Canada will continue to work with first nations leadership and the provinces to ensure short-term stabilization as well as monitoring of individuals going through opioid withdrawal. This support is in addition to the care offered by provincially funded treatment facilities.

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[Translation]

We are also addressing the abuse of prescription drugs by funding community substance abuse treatment programs. We are investing close to \$90 million a year to support a network of 58 drug and alcohol addiction treatment centres and prevention services that benefit close to 550 first nation and Inuit communities throughout Canada.

[English]

Working in co-operation with first nations, various Health Canada programs fund a variety of projects. Other treatments for drug dependency are also available.

The NIHB program provides coverage for methadone and Suboxone for the substitution treatment of opioid dependency. Suboxone is available for clients who are unable to take methadone due to life-threatening adverse reactions, such as a serious cardiac reaction to the drugs.

The NIHB program will also review requests for Suboxone from health providers on a case-by-case basis to help ensure first nations and Inuit clients who may not have access to methadone treatment can safely access substitution treatment without leaving their community.

Between December 7, 2011 and May 8, 2012, the NIHB program has approved 95% of the requests received for Suboxone coverage. When looking specifically at the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the program has approved 99% of the requests received with the remainder pending receipt of further information.

[Translation]

I would like to assure the House that Health Canada will continue to monitor and address this ongoing problem.

● (1940)

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, it is obvious that the Conservatives do not realize how bad the crisis is, and they continue to shirk their responsibility when it comes to aboriginal health.

This spring, the Minister of Health refused to meet with the community in Cat Lake. Now there is an opportunity to fix that snub.

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation has specific proposals that are worth considering, and I will paraphrase them.

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation would like to have culturally relevant and community-based treatment for drug addiction using their own effective strategies and models; in community recovery programs to rebuild families and communities while addressing the root causes of addiction; improved security and policing resources to reduce the supply of drugs into their territory; and appropriate economic development and education that will bring an element of hope to the young population for a brighter and more productive future.

Once again, I need to ask the question and I hope I will get an answer. Will the Conservative government work with communities like those in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, I cannot believe the hypocrisy of the NDP. Each time we try to work with first nations communities and put money aside in the budget, what do the NDP members do? They vote against it.

The member said earlier that we are making cuts to the health transfers to the provinces and territories. Actually, we are making a 6% increase per year, but each time we do that, the NDP votes against it.

It is our government that takes the misuse of prescription drugs seriously, and we are taking action. The pharmaceutical company that produces OxyContin, made a decision to cease distribution of that product and to replace it with OxyNEO, which is particularly harder to abuse because it is in a gel capsule.

Our NIHB program will automatically approve clients previously claiming OxyContin to use OxyNEO. Being mindful of the health and safety of Canadians, individuals should always consult their medical professionals and follow their directions.

However, individuals obtaining OxyContin from illegal sources may be affected when the drug is removed from the market. We will ensure that primary care supports are in place for short-term stabilization and monitoring of individuals who are going through opiate withdrawal.

Our government provides \$90 million annually for addictions programming, including funding to support a network of treatment centres for first nations. We will continue to fund prescription drug abuse prevention and treatment supports and services.

We hope that one day the NDP will actually take the issue seriously and help support first nations people and vote with the government for these very important programs.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn. The House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering all votes under National Defence in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013.

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

NATIONAL DEFENCE—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2012-13

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under National Defence in the main estimates, Ms. Denise Savoie in the chair)

The Chair: I would like to open this session of committee of the whole by making a short statement.

Business of Supply

Tonight's debate is being held under Standing Order 81(4)(a) which provides for each of two sets of estimates selected by the Leader of the Opposition to be considered in committee of the whole for up to four hours.

For some members, this may be the first time they participate in such a debate. Therefore, I would like to explain how we will proceed.

[*Translation*]

Tonight's debate is a general one on all of the votes under National Defence. The first round will begin with the usual rotation, with the official opposition followed by the government and the Liberal Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

● (1945)

[*English*]

Each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time, which may be used both for debate and for posing questions. Should members wish to use this time to make a speech, it can last a maximum of 10 minutes, leaving at least 5 minutes for questions to the minister.

When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15 minute period will be used—in other words, what portion will be used for speeches and what portions for questions and answers.

Members should also note that they will need the unanimous consent of the House if they wish to split their time with another member.

[*Translation*]

When the time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, since this time will be counted in the time originally allotted to the member.

[*English*]

Though members may speak more than once, the Chair will generally try to ensure that all members wishing to speak are heard before inviting members to speak again, while respecting the proportional party rotations for speakers.

Members need not be in their own seats to be recognized.

[*Translation*]

As your Chair, I shall be guided by the rules of the committee of the whole. However, in the interest of a full exchange, I am prepared to exercise discretion and flexibility in the application of these rules. The Chair will expect all hon. members to focus on the subject matter of the debate, the main estimates of the Department of National Defence.

[*English*]

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, ministers and members should be referred to by their title or riding name and all remarks should, as usual, be addressed through the Chair.

I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding the established standards to parliamentary language and behaviour.

[*Translation*]

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, the committee will rise, the estimates under National Defence will be deemed reported and the House will adjourn immediately until tomorrow.

[*English*]

We will now begin tonight's session of the House in committee of the whole pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), the first appointed day, consideration in the committee of the whole of all votes under National Defence in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013.

For the first comment, or statement, the hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Chair, I am happy to begin the evening's activities by using my time to ask questions. We have a lot of questions and I will not be speechifying.

I would like to start by asking the minister if he could deal with the section of the Auditor General's most recent report on the F-35s. In paragraph 2.54 of the report, it states that in 2008 the minister's department took an options analysis of three contending aircraft for the replacement of the F-18, based against high level mandatory capabilities and concluded that all three of the aircraft that were tested met the high level mandatory capabilities.

Could the minister confirm that this was the case and tell us what the other two aircraft were, because I understand the F-35 was one of the three?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Chair, the situation with respect to the F-35, we are being guided by the findings and the recommendation made by the Auditor General. It is our intent to engage the secretariat. We have already done so.

With respect to the going forward plan, we have a seven point strategic plan of action. The answers to most of these items will be forthcoming once the secretariat does its work.

● (1950)

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, I would like to ask the minister, who was minister at the time in 2008, if could he confirm that the Eurofighter and the Boeing Super Hornet were the other two aircraft, as has been reported in the press.

Perhaps the minister who was minister at the time in 2008 could answer that question.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I am happy to assist the hon. member opposite. Again, no decisions have been made with respect to the selection of a replacement for the aging CF-18 aircraft. That work will be forthcoming once we have the secretariat's findings with respect to the issues that the Auditor General brought forward in his recommendations to that effect.

Decisions with respect to replacement aircraft for those CF-18 will be made at that time.

Business of Supply

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, could the minister tell us whether any documentation was provided to the Minister of Defence, who was minister at the time, supporting the conclusions made by the Department of National Defence that the F-35 provided the lowest cost and unparalleled benefits for the Canadian aerospace industry?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, again, with respect to the future decisions to be made, they will be forthcoming once the secretariat has done the work that the Auditor General has requested.

We are committed to ensuring that the seven point action plan is followed and decisions will be forthcoming once those answers are provided.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, I can see what kind of night this is going to be.

Could the Minister of National Defence confirm the information that we have received, that the CF-18s have now been programmed to operate until 2025, that the department is actually engaging contracts to ensure that the CF-18s can continue to fly until 2025, and that this is part of the plan of the government?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, again, contingency plans are being developed. We are in a position of having to make some of the decisions once other answers are forthcoming. There is work being done. We are following the recommendations of the Auditor General. The secretariat will be providing information that will enable us to make those decisions.

However, we are very committed to ensuring that there will be no gap with respect to our ability to provide air fighter capabilities for Canada going forward.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, has the Department of National Defence let any contracts or engaged any contractors to continue the operation of the F-18s until 2025?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, if I may, the CF-18s will continue to be an effective fighter aircraft for the Royal Canadian Air Force until the 2020 time frame, thanks to the extensive modernization that has taken place on the fleet.

If the substitute aircraft is acquired, the delivery plan will be based on the most cost effective point in the production schedule, so as there will not be any gaps.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, clearly the minister is talking about the F-35.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, that decision has not been made as has been stated many times. There have been no moneys expended in the purchase of a replacement aircraft at this point in time.

We are, of course, as I stated earlier, committed to ensuring that we follow the recommendation made by the Auditor General. That work is being done as we speak. We anxiously await those answers to make further decisions.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, the minister clearly referred to fitting into a production schedule. The only production schedule that we know about is the F-35. Will he say that he was talking about the F-35 here?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I am talking about a replacement aircraft, whatever that might be. There would have to be scheduling taken into account. It is premature at this point in time to make a definitive conclusion as to what replacement aircraft will follow.

• (1955)

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, on April 11, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence told CBC that there would be no contract signed for a replacement until 2017 or 2018, when we are approaching the signing of a purchase agreement. The minister confirmed there will be no contracts signed until 2017 or 2018 for the purchase of replacement aircraft for the CF-18s.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, there has been no contract signed with respect to the purchase of replacement aircraft for our aging CF-18s.

The only agreements that have been entered into are those that lend Canada and eight other countries to work on a joint program to develop a next generation aircraft. Canada has not made any purchase or any commitment to purchase at this point in time that would lend credibility to a contract being in place.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, perhaps the minister did not understand or hear what I said, so I will repeat it again.

I have a transcript here of what the parliamentary secretary said. He said, "I can't confirm what the cost assumption will be in 2017 or 18 when we're approaching the signing of a purchase agreement".

Will the minister confirm that there will be no purchase agreements signed before that 2017-18 time frame?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, the operative word, view and reality is that no contract has yet been signed. We will make that decision upon the time frame when the secretariat will have done the work required, as recommended by the Auditor General. Until that point in time, any definitive time frame is really speculation.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, if the government members are going to continue stonewalling, I may as well ask more questions they can stonewall.

Could the minister tell us what the actual latest figure is for industrial benefits for the proposed F-35 purchase? Figures like \$14.7 billion or \$12 billion have been used and we are now down to \$9.8 billion in terms of potential industrial benefits for Canadian industry. Could the minister tell us what the real figure is and what the actual projections are today?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, we have not signed any contract as yet. We are engaged, as was stated, with eight other partner nations in the development of the aircraft. There are considerable benefits being derived for the aerospace industry in our country as we speak. However, the final outcome of all this will be determined once we enter, finally, if we do, into an agreement to purchase the F-35.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, perhaps the minister does not pay attention either to what goes on in House of Commons committees. The House of Commons committee was told last Thursday that Canadian companies could bid on as much as \$9.85 billion in production contracts for the U.S. stealth fighter. Is the minister aware of that number?

Business of Supply

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, yes, we are aware of that number. The definitive number is not as yet determined. We will have to wait and see if and when the final contract is, if it is in fact, penned.

As of now, there are industrial benefits to the Canadian aerospace industry, including the employment of substantial numbers of Canadian aerospace workers, and to the Canadian economy worth \$430-plus million today, as we speak.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, that figure of \$9.8 billion, as the official from the Department of Industry indicated, was actually what they could bid on, not what could they could get or are actually going to get. The Auditor General has said as well that these were the most optimistic scenarios being put forward, with no real background for them.

Could the Minister of Defence tell us how that compares to the dollar for dollar industrial and regional benefits that Canadian defence procurement has traditionally required, when we are talking about \$14.7 billion, at a minimum, of purchase and sustainment costs over the next 20 years?

• (2000)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I can say with conviction that having dialogued and spent time with the Canadian aerospace industry, it is very interested and supportive of this particular endeavour. I should also say that going forward we are dealing with estimates. We will have to wait and see how decisions are made, when they are made and under what circumstances in order to establish a definitive figure.

I should add as well that this is one of the reasons we have a secretariat. It is one of the reasons we need these details in order to go forward.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, we have been having this debate for three years now and the government has been putting forth these numbers. Is it giving up on all these numbers now and trying to say that they are meaningless?

The fact is that, based on these numbers, \$5 billion are missing in industrial and regional development benefits that would have taken place if we had followed what the Minister of National Defence said on May 27 at the estimates committee meetings, which was that there would be a fair, open and transparent competition. Will there be a fair, open and transparent competition for replacement of the CF-18s?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I think we are leap-frogging ahead of decisions yet to be made and, in fact, yet to be brought forward. This is why we are very respectful of the recommendation made by the Auditor General. It makes perfect sense that we have details, such as the hon. member opposite is asking for, so we can then make a decision as to how we will replace the aging CF-18s.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, there will be others who will ask some further detailed questions about this, despite the fact that we are being stonewalled and getting no answers from the ministers opposite. That is a great pity for the people of Canada who are being asked and have been asked to support this project for the last two years.

As a result of the budget, we have been told by the president of the Canadian Military Colleges Faculty Association that about 20% of the 182 faculty positions at the Royal Military College and other military colleges in Canada will be eliminated. How does the minister feel the education of our officers in training for the Canadian Forces will benefit by eliminating 20% of the faculty, affecting approximately 160 fewer courses at our military college?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Chair, I am extremely proud as chancellor of RMC to see the progress that it has made during the time that we have been in government. We have been investing significantly during our time in office. What we are seeing now is a focus during these particular times on core strength. That includes core curriculum strength at the Royal Military College. We will continue to provide an array of programs and courses that will ensure that the Canadian Forces will be well served into the future by those young cadets who are doing their studies currently and getting ready to graduate this spring.

The Chair: I will now go to the Minister of National Defence for his statement.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Chair, it is a pleasure to be here this evening discussing a great passion for many Canadians, which is the committee of the whole and the discussion around the Department of National Defence. I am joined here, ably, by the Chief of Defence Staff, General Walt Natynczyk; the deputy minister of National Defence, Rob Fonberg; as well as Kevin Lindsey, the chief financial officer from the Department of National Defence; along with our members.

I want to thank members and those tuning in at home for their attention, their affection and their interest in the department. In fact, during my time as minister of the crown, we continually focus on ensuring that we communicate regularly with Canadians, as we do with parliamentarians. In fact, this is my 25th appearance before a committee, my second with respect to a committee of the whole.

• (2005)

[*Translation*]

As you know, I am a strong advocate of the Canadian Forces and of the critical role that they play for Canada and the whole world. So, I am always pleased to have the opportunity to promote the important work that this government, the department, and the Canadian Forces are doing in the defence of Canada, and in support of our allies.

[*English*]

Over the past four and a half years, I have had the distinct pleasure of leading a tough, energetic, patriotic and committed team of defence professionals. Whether tackling the massive challenges of deploying over 40,000 Canadian Forces members who rotated through Afghanistan or working tirelessly here at home to provide emergency assistance to thousands of Canadians in their time of need, I have always been impressed by their ability to adapt and persevere, to come together as a united military and civilian defence team in the performance of their mission, no matter what the challenge or how high the tempo.

Business of Supply

As members know, it has been another busy year for the Department of National Defence, a pivotal one. Over the past 12 months we have successfully wrapped up two international operations in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and in Libya, stood up our training mission in northern Afghanistan and continued to carry out a broad range of security missions at home and around the world; 15 in total. There are currently more than 1,300 Canadian Forces personnel in NATO and UN missions in combined ops around the world, and Canadian military personnel continue to serve our interests at home and abroad and are protecting and projecting the values Canadians hold dear.

At the same time, we have maintained an ongoing focus on building a strong, modern, capable military by investing in the tools and resources needed to meet the challenges of the future in the next 50 years and beyond.

Members will know that our Canadian government has invested almost \$1 billion annually in increasing the National Defence budget since we took office in 2006. We now have an annual budget of roughly \$20 billion and we have in our employ over 133,000 committed Canadians, both civilian and military.

The main estimates that we have before us this evening reflect our evolving operational context and represent the government's plan to continue the stable and responsible provision of resources to support National Defence over the next fiscal year.

We are currently in the fourth year of implementing our comprehensive 20 year Canada first defence strategy announced in Halifax by the Prime Minister in 2008. As I told a Senate committee on security and defence last week, even though we are still in the early implementation years of this visionary strategy, we have already delivered some impressive achievements across all four pillars of personnel, equipment, infrastructure and readiness.

[Translation]

We have not only successfully expanded the size of both our regular and reserve force, but we have also significantly improved the quality of care we provide them.

[English]

We have added \$100 million to the base health budget of the Canadian Forces since 2006, bringing the annual health budget up to well over \$450 million. Through the creation of the Joint Personnel Support Unit, we have helped provide streamlined one-stop service for our military personnel, our ill and injured, our veterans, as well as families through a network of 24 integrated personnel support centres located at bases around the country. Through programs, such as caring for our own, legacy of care and soldier on, we are helping provide comprehensive medical care, counselling and other services to ill and injured as well as their families through the process of recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration. Through programs like soldier on or shoulder to shoulder, we are strengthening and facilitating access to counselling, care and support services for families and their loved ones in the Canadian Forces and for members who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

However, we continue to do more. We are committed to supporting our military personnel in every sense of the word and, of

course, that includes providing them with the tools they need to do their important work.

I am very pleased and proud to be here tonight with the Associate Minister of National Defence who will be speaking to some of those improvements that we have seen in the past number of years.

Our government has already made great strides in delivering modernized capabilities, programs and equipment to support military operational needs. We have initiated numerous other projects to ensure members of the Canadian Forces continue to have the necessary tools to protect Canadians and support our allies well into the future.

We have also made important investments in renewing our military infrastructure across the country by refurbishing or replacing numerous buildings, training facilities and personnel support centres to enhance the health, quality of life and effectiveness of our standing military units.

Finally, we have increased our focus on equipment maintenance, personnel, training and joint exercises, including in the High Arctic and in partnership with our allies and civilian partners to further enhance flexibility, interoperational ability and operational readiness of our military.

The government is very proud of these achievements and very proud of each and every member of the incredible National Defence team. We believe they have made a direct contribution to the outstanding operational success of the Canadian Forces in recent years. Our investments and support helped our men and women in uniform provide emergency assistance to the people of Haiti in January 2010, even while they were helping secure the Vancouver Olympics and the G20 and G8 venues in Ontario. They have helped us to stop the Gadhafi regime from attacking its own people in March of last year, even while our combat patrols were fighting insurgency in Afghanistan.

● (2010)

[Translation]

Canadians too are proud of their military's accomplishments. They recognize the sacrifice that these extraordinary men and women make each day and they expect us to recognize and support them in their service to Canada and to Canadians.

[English]

Our government can truthfully say that our investment plan has already proven in its ability to deliver tangible benefits to the defence of Canada. The approval of these estimates is crucial to maintaining this quality of support for the years to come.

Business of Supply

I want to assure hon. members that our estimates reflect the broader economic goals of the Government of Canada. That is why we have included the reallocation of \$525 million from the National Defence budget to support government-wide efficiency efforts, slowing growth and ensuring that progress will be there in critical areas for the foreseeable future. That is why one of the key areas of DND's main estimates for the fiscal year is nearly \$1.5 billion lower than the year 2011-12.

As Minister of Defence, I am committed to providing Canadians with a modern, agile, responsive and, most of all, sustainable military that reflects both the security and fiscal needs of our country. In today's economic climate, this is an ambitious objective and one that will extend well beyond the timeframe that is captured in these estimates.

As always, we have an incredible National Defence team committed to that goal. For a few years now, we have been pursuing a number of efforts to review National Defence programming in an effort to optimize our investments in capability, in effect changing the very way we do business in National Defence, so as to maximize the efficiencies of our headquarters and administration, and reallocate internal resources toward what matters most to Canadians, and that is tangible operational output. These efforts will help the National Defence team not only to operate within the fiscal environment, but also to ensure that we become leaner, more agile and better positioned to respond to unpredictable security challenges in the future.

[Translation]

Although the conclusion of our combat operations in Afghanistan and of NATO operations in Libya may have temporarily provided us with an opportunity to catch our breath as an institution and focus on longer-term priorities, there is simply no way to know where or when the next major crisis—or series of crises—will occur that might test the capacity, flexibility or readiness of our forces.

[English]

We owe that to our citizens. We certainly owe that to our allies. However, most of all, we owe that to the men and women in uniform who will answer the call when it comes and who will rely on the training, the equipment and support that we are investing in now to give them the ability to get the job done and return home to their families safely.

I want to take a moment to thank all of those brave soldiers of the Canadian Forces who accept this unlimited liability, this massive responsibility that we ask of them, and I thank their families for supporting them and standing behind them in this time.

I also take this opportunity to thank members present for their interest and continued support for the Canadian Forces and the defence of Canada. I welcome their questions here this evening.

Hon. Peter Penashue (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC): Madam Chair, in his earlier remarks, the Minister of National Defence mentioned the importance of investing in renewing our military infrastructure. This emphasis that he places on infrastructure renewal is demonstrated in his recent announcement of the three new

infrastructure projects valued at \$62 million for the environmental remediation at 5 Wing Goose Bay in my riding of Labrador.

Could you please inform the committee of the whole of the importance that our government places on environmental stewardship of lands, on the Department of National Defence and on our commitment to conducting operations in ways that protect human health and the environment, as well as ensuring it fully complies with the government's environmental legislation, regulation and guidelines?

• (2015)

The Chair: Before the minister responds, I would like to remind all members as we begin this evening to direct all their comments through the Chair to the appropriate minister.

There are three minutes left. The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, this issue around Goose Bay is one of great interest to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. It is certainly a high priority for the Department of National Defence when it comes to such things as environmental programs.

As a good environmental steward, the Department of National Defence has been addressing a number of environmental problems that we inherited, quite frankly, over a long period of time. With respect to Goose Bay, he is right, we had the opportunity together to make a significant announcement of a project in Happy Valley-Goose Bay for \$62 million for environmental remediation of 5 Wing Goose Bay.

The department continues to work on contaminated sites and hazardous wastes in managing this project in a safe and prudent fashion. We have taken important steps to move ahead in environmental remediation. We have seen a number of other projects that will move forward in the future as well, projects that have a value of \$300 million when it comes to the remediation activities that go back as far as 2009.

Other investments in the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2009 include the \$42.5 million investment for the construction of a facility to house 91 construction engineering flight, as well as the construction of two multi-purpose facilities to consolidate 9 Wing unit support, and infrastructure projects at the base that include runway improvements and housing upgrades.

I am also proud to say that we have taken great strides to work closely with the local community and with the aboriginal community. We continue to do so to make use of the spectacular base that is 5 Wing Goose Bay.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Madam Chair, in the minister's remarks to the committee of the whole, he mentioned several of the programs and initiatives that the government has launched to provide care and support for our brave men and women in uniform. After a decade of service in Afghanistan and the unusually high operational tempo of the past two years, we must make certain that our ill and injured receive the help that they so rightly deserve. However, this has fallen through the cracks in previous governments.

Business of Supply

Could the minister please tell the committee of the whole how his department has made improvements on mental health services?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I am pleased to be here in the presence, in particular, of the Chief of Defence Staff, General Natynczyk. He has been a leader in this regard, addressing these issues specifically.

On the resource side we have seen an additional \$100 million, I mentioned that earlier, directly invested in the important mental health and overall health budget of the Canadian Forces. We have put in place a number of programs that encourage members of the forces and their families and veterans to come forward and address these issues of mental health, address the stigma around these issues.

As a department, we have received national recognition from the Mental Health Association of Canada. We continue to make these investments because we understand that, with the high operational tempo that we have seen in recent years in Afghanistan, we have members of the Canadian Forces and their families who need that support. That is why any changes we are seeing now will not affect direct core health services, particularly those around mental health treatment.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Chair, could the minister tell the committee of the whole, what is the government document that gives the basis for first strike capability?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, there has been a lot of research, a lot of work and a lot of studies carried out with respect to the methodology and appropriate replacement of our aging CF-18s. A lot of these issues will be forthcoming once we have the Auditor General's recommendations fleshed out.

● (2020)

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, I asked for the document. What document does the Government of Canada have for deciding to enter into first strike capability?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, if I may, as Canada's CF-18s are nearing the end of their usable lives, we must acquire replacements for fighter capability to serve our needs.

We cannot know all of the potential threats that Canada may face in the future. However, as outlined in the Canada first defence strategy, the Royal Canadian Air Force requires these replacement aircraft. We are looking for a multi-role capability. There will be other decisions made, and those will be forthcoming.

Hon. John McKay: Sir, the question is very simple. What is the document? Where is it? You have made a decision that you want to make Canada into a first strike nation. Where is the document? Where is the basis for it?

The Chair: Order. Again, before the hon. minister responds, I would like to remind everyone to direct their comments through the Chair to the appropriate minister.

The hon. associate minister.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, at this point in time, we do not have all of the requisite requirements detailed. Those issues will be forthcoming once a definite decision is made. That decision will be forthcoming.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, am I to understand from the minister's response that the Government of Canada has no document which requires that Canada have first strike capability? Is that the answer the hon. minister is giving?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, the requirements are of a high level. They are dealing with a multi-role capability, not a strike capability per se.

The hon. member opposite may recall that we have tendered stacks and stacks of documents for the committee to review, among which would be some of these answers that he is seeking.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, I just make note that we had to actually cite the government for contempt before it produced what it produced.

What the minister seems to be saying at this point is that the government, since 2006, has not had a document that requires that Canada have first strike capability. Is that correct, minister?

The Chair: Again, through the Chair. The hon. associate minister.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, if I may, the documents the hon. member opposite is speaking about have been tendered with the committee. He is a member of that committee, and I would assume that he would have read them by now.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, under embargo, I might point out.

Would the minister then indicate to the House the cost of running an F-35 on a per hour basis as set out in this Selected Acquisition Report?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I am pleased to again repeat the operative and relevant answer to the hon. member's question. We are dutifully following the recommendation made by the Auditor General with respect to certainty of pricing, costing and so forth. We intend to do that. We are committed to ensuring that we bring forward the most appropriate and finite details in order for these decisions to be made.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, I just take note and direct the minister's attention to a document called the Selected Acquisition Report, dated December 31, 2011. Therein it sets out the costs of an F-35 at \$32,000 an hour.

Does the hon. minister know what the operating costs of an F-18 are?

● (2025)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, again I repeat, we are bringing all those figures forward in an organized, detailed way, as was recommended by the Auditor General. I am not in a position at this point in time to speculate on that very recommendation until such time as we have the answer.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, this is an historical figure. The minister is surrounded by the Chief of Defence Staff and every senior official in the Department of Defence. Is there no one in the House tonight who can say what the operating costs of an F-18 might be on a per hour basis?

Business of Supply

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, as the minister knows, the methodology by which costings have been gathered and reported has been the subject of some dispute and debate. The Auditor General has made the recommendation that we need to make finite those particular numbers and bring certainty to those numbers. We are doing exactly that.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, these are historical facts. DND keeps these numbers.

All I am asking for is a very simple number. How much does it cost to operate the F-18 on a per hour basis?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, again I repeat, the Auditor General addressed the issue and the discrepancies with respect to cost. We have taken his recommendation. There is a secretariat in place whose job and responsibility is to bring those costs forward in a factual, organized fashion. We are waiting for that to happen.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, does the hon. member agree that the normal military procurement is basically dollar for dollar, if \$100 is spent on the acquisition of an asset, \$100 is received in industrial benefits?

Why, therefore, would the government enter into a contract where there is not going to be a return of dollar for dollar? At this point, there is approximately \$400 million worth of contracts being let. That was true in 2005 and it is also true in 2012. Why is there no increase over seven years? There is \$330 billion that has been spent on the program.

The government has traded millions for billions.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I think we are talking about millions, not billions.

Regardless, I want to again emphasize this. If the hon. member were to read the report, he would see that throughout the report there are discrepancies with regard to how the pricings and costings have been reported. We are respectful of the recommendations made by the Auditor General. We have put in place a seven point action plan to fulfill his specific recommendation. Those answers will be forthcoming.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, we are waiting for these answers to be forthcoming. Something might freeze over while we wait.

The government touts the success of achieving \$400 million worth of contracts when \$330 billion has been spent on the program. Why would the government trade millions for billions?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, it is really surprising that the member would not have these details. The CF-18 program was started under his government. Those figures would have been available. I am sure the member could well acquaint himself with those.

However, we are going to maintain respect for the Auditor General's recommendation on pricing and cost, and how that is going to unfold. We will, as I said earlier, be bringing those determinate figures forward at the right time.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, refresh my memory here, I thought we were asking the questions and he was supposed to have

the answers. Thus far, the hon. member does not seem to know too much about his own program. Let me try another question.

With respect to the development of the F-35 versus the F-18, currently we can basically build an F-18 in Montreal, stem to gudgeon. If we acquire the F-35, will we have similar capability?

• (2030)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, this is an awful lot of supposition. We are not moving along the lines of supposition and what if's. We are going to act on definitive figures. Those figures will be forthcoming. Decisions have not been made as yet.

We will continue to work with our partners on the development of the joint strike fighter, but as of yet no decisions have been made. I do not quite know what is happening in Montreal that the hon. member across is speaking about.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, I recommend a tour by the minister of the facility in Montreal. He will realize that over the lifetime of the F-18 we have developed a considerable capability, which is a very important capability. In fact other nations come to us to have F-18s fixed.

Will we be able to fix the F-35s over the course of their projected life cycle in the same fashion as the F-18s?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, the hon. member is leap-frogging ahead.

No decision has been made with respect to the acquisition of our replacement aircraft for the CF-18s. We are not in a position to guess. We are acting very diligently and responsibly on the recommendations of the Auditor General. Decisions will be forthcoming once the facts and figures are known, upon which decisions can be made.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, does the minister know how much of the F-35's expected lifetime will be spent in North American airspace?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I appreciate the guesswork here. We are not getting into that. We do not know that we are going to buy or contract to purchase the F-35. Those are presumptions and speculations, which I am not prepared to answer.

Canadians want facts. They want decisions made on the basis of facts, not conjecture.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, the Department of National Defence keeps meticulous records as to how much is domestic and how much is international. Based upon that, could the hon. minister project how much the replacement jet fighter will spend in North American airspace?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, clearly the hon. member is asking us to look into the future to determine what missions we would be flying with the replacement aircraft, where we would be going. What missions we would be flying over North America is still speculation at this point.

For a member who has now spent his time in the third row in the third party, he should know better.

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Hon. John McKay: Madam Chair, the interesting fact is the minister is now saying he is purchasing aircraft and he does not know how much time will be spent in domestic airspace and how much will be spent in international airspace. The consequence of which is he is essentially flying blind. That is what he is telling us. The government is flying blind.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, the entire mission set of the Canadian Forces is premised on our ability to look out into the future, to see what we will need for domestic operations at home, in North America, what missions might exist.

No one would have anticipated the mission over Libya. No one could have said with certainty that we would be in Kosovo.

The hon. member may be Nostradamus. He may have some ability to look well into the future and determine with certainty where we will be, but what I can assure the hon. member is we will be ready. This government intends to give the forces the equipment it will need to be ready.

• (2035)

The Chair: Order, please. The time has lapsed.

The Associate Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Chair, I am pleased to be here this evening with my colleagues and the representatives of the Canadian armed forces to discuss a number of important issues and what they mean for the Canadian Forces and Canadians in general.

The opposition would want us to return to the decade of darkness and not provide the essential tools our men and women in uniform need to do their job.

Our Conservative government has been clear. This will not happen. With the support of the Canadian public, we are equipping the military for the challenges of today and for those of the future.

As a government, we have responsibility to keep our country strong and free. This government will continue to ensure our men and women in uniform have the support they need to protect our country and represent our interests abroad.

We have a duty to Canadians to prepare for situations and circumstances in advance so we are ready and able to deal with future challenges.

Through my many years in policing and decades of work with the Canadian Forces Liaison Council, I have developed a deep appreciation for the professionalism of our Canadian Forces and what proper equipment and preparation means in an emergency situation both at home and abroad.

As the Associate Minister of National Defence, I oversee the procurement of major assets and equipment. Meeting this important responsibility is best done through methods I know work from my previous public service sector.

We need to provide value for the hard-earned dollars of Canadians. As trusted custodians of the public purse, we must continually balance needs against available resources and affordability. Determining this balance requires a hands-on approach. It requires that I go beyond the executive summary and immerse

myself in the finer aspects of the file to witness, experience and engage in the issues first hand and up close.

This is my style. I have learned valuable lessons by immersing myself in my portfolio and personally engaging with Canadians who do the heavy lifting on a daily basis, our men and women in uniform.

In my current role, I have travelled to Afghanistan to see first hand the brave work our soldiers are doing to help rebuild the country. Our soldiers told me that the enhanced equipment they received saved lives and even better equipment on the way would save more lives, injury and trauma.

I met with our highly-skilled fighter pilots who returned from a successful mission in Libya. They told me that although their current equipment worked well today, it would not suffice in the battle space of tomorrow, and they are absolutely right.

My trip to Winnipeg to meet with search and rescue teams allowed me to see first hand how Canadians were being well-served by some of our best SAR technicians in the world. Canadians who find themselves in distress depend upon them. That is why it is important to have the right equipment ready for the task, at any time, in any weather.

In Vancouver I was proud to see first hand the hundreds of skilled workers who were in the process of modernizing our Halifax class frigates. These are Canadian workers who take their jobs very seriously. They have every right to be proud of the state-of-the-art equipment and services they provide to strengthen the effectiveness of our Royal Canadian Navy.

While touring Canadian industries that are contributing to the joint strike fighter program, I also saw first hand the benefits to Canadian workers in our economy our industrial benefits policies provide.

These experiences have given me the unique opportunity to witness the pride of Canadians as they help design and build for both our nation and allies, cutting-edge fighters for the next generation. They have told me how participation in this program ensures they have good-paying, skilled jobs in Canada well into the future.

I feel privileged to have a front-row seat to witness first hand the leadership that Canadians are taking on multiple fronts around the world.

In Washington we gathered our allies together at our Canadian embassy to demonstrate leadership on the complicated joint strike fighter file.

In Texas I heard how Canadian industry was providing unique solutions to the toughest technological challenges of today and of tomorrow. Our workers are providing aerospace skills and knowledge other nations strive to achieve.

During the Libya campaign, I met with General Bouchard in Italy. I also met other NATO commanders who praised our Canadian military that took a leading role in the international mission.

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• (2040)

Our air crews were among the most respected, and we should be proud of their successful efforts.

Our service abroad does come at a cost and it is appropriate to acknowledge the many Canadians who paid the ultimate sacrifice in service to Canada in current and past conflicts.

The repatriation ceremonies I have attended in Trenton attest to the fact that the actions on foreign battlefields have lasting impacts at home. I cannot put into words the emotion one goes through on these sad but proud occasions, which have also enhanced my resolve to provide our military men and women with the best equipment available to achieve mission success and optimum safety. Never do I want to have to explain to a grieving family that we did not do our best to provide the essential tools and support for its loved one to return home safely.

I challenge the opposition this evening to put itself in this head space and think carefully about its questions and what it has really asked this government to do.

We know that military equipment is expensive, but one must understand we cannot be penny-wise and proud foolish when lives are at stake, as is the reputation of Canada among our allies.

Being responsible for military procurement, I must balance a moral obligation with the responsibility to provide value for money. This balance is the responsibility of all members of the House and most assuredly of this government.

As I saw first hand in London, Ontario, Canadians are taking the many lessons learned in Afghanistan and elsewhere to make our light armoured vehicles safer for our soldiers. This upgrade is expensive, but the additional safety and likelihood of mission success is worth every penny.

Those who have studied military procurement understand it is very complex. It is difficult to comment definitively on these matters because often there are challenges in sharing sensitive information and to make accurate assessments. Commentary is often misunderstood, misreported and misinformed. It adds little to explaining for some why we procure such equipment.

Tonight I ask the opposition to focus as much on the why as to the how in these matters. Our government, through the Canada first defence strategy, is committed to providing the equipment our military needs. We are doing this in a fiscally responsible manner, while ensuring we meet the needs of today along with the anticipated challenges of tomorrow.

My pledge to Canadians has always been to spend their money as I would my own. I recognize the trust that has been placed in us and the importance of honouring those expectations.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Madam Chair, after a decade of darkness under the Liberals, which I know very well because I served in the CF in that period, Canada's armed forces were left in a state of disrepair, unable to perform as well as they could have. Our government, since taking office, has made a remarkable effort to correct the misguided policies of the previous Liberal government.

While it has never been with the support of the opposition, we have made substantial investments in our military so we can regain our once proud standing on the world stage and, more important, be ready to defend Canada and protect our interests.

Could the associate minister tell us what the government record is in this regard?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member, not only for his question but also for his years of dedicated service to this country. I applaud his contributions in this regard.

I would suggest that it is no secret that our military was suffering from rust out under the previous government. Early in our mandate, we released the Canada first defence strategy, which has been our guiding policy in revitalizing our military for today and the future. Our actions speak for themselves. We now have four Globemaster cargo planes that have allowed Canada to respond to humanitarian disasters and get critical people and equipment to our operations abroad. They also play an important role in moving equipment throughout Canada.

We have successfully replaced our workhorse aircraft, the Hercules, with a newer model that can carry more, fly faster, fly further and provide the strategic airlift needed. We are replacing our aging fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft to ensure we can continue to provide world-leading search and rescue services. New capability in the Arctic offshore patrol ships, which Canada has never had before, will allow us to patrol our Arctic shores and defend our sovereignty.

New joint support ships and fleet of service combatant ships will fully equip members of our Royal Canadian Navy to do the job we ask of them and they will be better able to respond to our current and future needs.

To better protect our troops, we are upgrading our light armoured vehicles with the latest protection and weapons systems. We are also replacing our vehicle fleets to make it safer for those men and women who put their lives on the line on the battlefield. We are taking possession of a new fleet of tanks to ensure we are prepared for theatres like Afghanistan, and, unlike the Liberals, we will not send our troops unprepared into lethal situations. We have successfully procured 37 lightweight towed Howitzers, which allow us to play a key role in protecting our troops in Afghanistan.

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By any means, our efforts to revitalize the military and properly equip its members for their job is ambitious, successful and, unfortunately, at this time much needed. Had the previous government done its job properly, our military would have the equipment it needs. I would also like to remind the members opposite that military procurement provides thousands of jobs for Canadians and benefits our national economy. These jobs are often highly skilled, high-paying jobs that bring economic benefit to communities across this nation and I invite the hon. members opposite to get on with the program.

• (2045)

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Madam Chair, my question is also for the Associate Minister of National Defence.

Under the previous Liberal government, Canada did not have the ability to move much equipment by air. Our aircraft were not large enough and were already fully tasked to other duties. Any time we wanted to move large equipment or lots of it by air, it was embarrassing, to say the least. As a G7 country, we had to beg a lift from our allies or hitch a ride on a rented cargo plane from another country. When the Conservatives took government, they were criticized by the opposition for moving so quickly with such an expensive procurement.

I would like to ask the minister to tell us, in hindsight, whether it was worth it. Did Canada make the right decision?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, this procurement was completed in 2008, record time for a procurement of this size and complexity. Just weeks after we took delivery of these aircraft, we put them to valuable use, meeting the dire needs of those in Jamaica after hurricane Dean. Since that time, these critical assets have allowed us to properly serve our troops in Afghanistan and around the globe. Their sheer size and flexibility have unquestionably given our military the strategic independence it could have only dreamed of under the Liberal government.

For my colleagues in the NDP, I only need remind them of the many humanitarian missions these very capable aircraft have provided in areas such as Afghanistan, Haiti, in the wake of Katrina and even domestically. This procurement is one of the shining examples of why it is dangerous to let the NDP and the Liberals define our military procurements. If they had their way, we would be calling for help when others need us most.

I am proud of what our government has been able to provide for our military and, just as important, what we have been able to provide to those in need, and I stand by that statement.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Chair, I would ask the Minister of National Defence, given the exchanges we have had tonight, to clarify the mission of Canada's fighter fleet and the question of first strike versus multi-purpose.

• (2050)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity for clarification. It was a question that came earlier from a Liberal member with respect to the term "first strike capability". This is a term that is commonly used, as most would know. It is around a

doctrine that governs the use of nuclear weapons, and, as Canadians know, we do not possess nuclear weapons and have no intention to obtain nuclear weapons. So this first strike capability question is, in this context, quite irrelevant. There is no doctrine in that regard that would apply to the Canadian Forces and its use.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Madam Chair, with your permission, I would like to share my time with the hon. member for St. John's East.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: There is no unanimous consent.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, why did the Minister of National Defence ask Public Works and Government Services Canada to relinquish its procurement role?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, it is no secret that, based on the recommendation from the Auditor General, now the Department of Public Works has taken on an expanded role with respect to the acquisition of the next generation fighter. In that role, we are acting on the recommendation of the Auditor General. There is a seven-step process that includes greater transparency, reporting to Parliament and the independent verification of numbers. This will enhance the co-operation that is already well known and historically based between—

The Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Pontiac.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, the minister should perhaps clean his ears. My question was clear. I did not ask a question about the current situation and the Auditor General's report. I asked him why, originally, he asked Public Works and Government Services Canada to relinquish its procurement responsibilities for the F-35 jets.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I think the member might want to try to rephrase his question if he is not asking why Public Works has an expanded role. I am responding to the reality that has occurred as a result of the recommendation of the Auditor General. Public Works has taken on an expanded role, continuing to work with the Department of National Defence and industry, to look at the procurement of the next generation fighter aircraft. As part of that process, it will include an injection of a number—

The Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Pontiac.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, if he does not wish to answer, perhaps he could tell me why his letter, which was addressed to Public Works and Government Services Canada and which requested that the department relinquish its procurement role, did not contain any more details about the specific requirements for the F-35 jets.

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[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, the hon. member may want to be more specific. I have responded to his question with information that is well documented and on the public record. I will not tell him how to ask his questions if he does not tell me how to answer them.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, if he would answer my questions, I would not need to tell him how to answer my questions, as is the case at present.

Why did DND wait until August 2010 to complete a statement of operational requirements for Public Works and Government Services Canada?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Chair, the Department of Public Works and Government Services never abdicated its role in this process. As the hon. member knows, Canada has a Defence Production Act and PWGSC is responsible for it. The department clearly took on that responsibility by carrying out many procurement exercises, including the work that has been done to date to replace the CF-18s.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, I will try again.

You tried to answer the question that I asked earlier, but you did not really succeed. Perhaps you should wait for the translation.

The Chair: Order, please. I once again ask all hon. members to address their questions to the Chair.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, I asked why the department waited until August 2010 to provide a statement of operational requirements to the Department of Public Works and Government Services. That was the question.

• (2055)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Chair, all of the measures taken to date by the Department of National Defence and the Department of Public Works and Government Services were very well analyzed in the Auditor General's report. I would recommend that the hon. member reread the report if he has not yet memorized it.

The important thing right now—

The Chair: Order. The hon. member for Pontiac.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, I did not ask about the contents of the letter. I asked why he waited until August 2010.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, we have answered this question many times. The process seeks to improve the review process for the next-generation fighter aircraft. It is clear that there is now greater transparency and accountability, and we continue to work with all departments on this very important procurement project.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, why did you wait one month after the government announced its decision to purchase the F-35 jets? You waited one month before providing a statement of operational requirements. Why the one-month delay?

The Chair: Once again, I would ask members to direct their questions through the chair.

Because there was no translation, could the hon. member repeat his question?

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Of course, Madam Chair.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell us why the department did not provide the statement of operational requirements until one month after it announced its decision to purchase the F-35 jets? Why wait one month?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, the Department of National Defence does not base its decisions solely on one piece of information, on one letter. The letter represents just one aspect of all the information needed to make such a decision. Again, as the Associate Minister of National Defence said, we have not made a decision yet. In concert with Public Works and Government Services, we have set up a process to continue reviewing the matter of procuring our next planes.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, the minister just said there was a process in place, but it is clear there was no process. It is clear. They had already decided to buy the F-35s before even sending the statement of operational requirements to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Why?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I do not agree with what the member has just said. We have not made that decision. That is exactly why we have in place the secretariat and the leadership of Public Works. What he is referring to in some of his minutia is the statement of requirements, which is a highly technical document that Public Works did not request at the time.

Now we have a process whereby we will be able to share greater information, move forward to ensure greater transparency, accountability, reporting to Parliament and independent oversight. All of this will build confidence and, most important, ensure that we get the right aircraft for the Canadian Forces.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, the minister knows that is not true because at a press conference on July 15, 2010, he announced that they had already made a decision on the F-35s. It was your press conference. I will move on to something else.

Answer me this: as far as the mandatory requirements in the statement of operational requirements developed by the Department of National Defence are concerned, how many requirements did the F-35 fail to meet?

The Chair: Once again, I would remind the hon. member to address his comments to the Chair, as I will not respond to direct questions.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, clearly the member would know that this is a development aircraft and in order for a decision to be made, all of the requirements will need to be met.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: Madam Chair, I asked the hon. minister to tell me what requirements the F-35s have failed to satisfy so far.

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Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Chair, as the hon. member must know, a tremendous number of documents, including the documents he is talking about right now, have been submitted to the Standing Committee on National Defence. There are various stages to the analysis that has been done so far. Yes, the F-35 is still in the development process, but we have shared everything we know about this aircraft in committee.

Why did he not take the time to read those documents?

• (2100)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, in short, they do not know which requirements the F-35 does or does not meet at this time.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Chair, I did not understand the question, but I would like to reiterate to the member that the requirements expressed by Canada, by National Defence, have been very clear so far. This aircraft is still being developed. We expect all requirements to be met before Canada will take any procurement steps.

A tremendous number of very detailed documents was submitted to the committee. Why—

The Chair: Order. I asked that ministers' responses reflect approximately the time taken by the question.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, they cannot even tell me which of the 28 mandatory requirements the aircraft do not currently meet.

More specifically, do the 360-degree view pilot helmets meet the requirements right now?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, as was stated earlier, I can give the hon. member opposite assurances that this is an aircraft in development. There is still a way to go before definitive outcomes are achieved. We are watching and monitoring the development very carefully, along with our partner nations. A decision will be made when those answers are forthcoming and we have a better understanding of the issues, and then Canada will decide.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, if they did not know that the F-35s would meet all of the requirements, why did they choose them?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, this is conjecture, speculation and interpreting things that just are not true. I do not know how many more times the hon. member opposite needs to hear the same answer: we have not determined that the F-35 will be the replacement for our aging CF-18s. Those decisions are not as yet made, and the member knows that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, everything depends on the term “fifth generation”. The Auditor General pointed out that the term “fifth generation” is not a description of operational requirements.

Can the Minister of National Defence confirm that it was a fiction in terms of their need for the F-35s?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, there is no fiction here. We are very serious about ensuring that our men and women are given the tools to do their job. Canada is committed to supporting our men and women. We are not operating in fiction. We are operating on fact and on reality, and I am surprised the member would suggest otherwise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, if they are indeed operating on the basis of reality, what does “fifth generation” mean to military procurement professionals?

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, on the terminology, if I can interpret on what I know about what we are talking about here, we are talking about enhancing the capabilities of our fighter aircraft beyond what is now available in the CF-18.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, the associate minister has to admit that there are planes other than the F-35s that can do that.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, that is not correct. What separates some aircraft from others is stealth.

There are aircraft that have the ability to avoid detection by radar. There is on-board equipment that pertains to the aircraft's operations and communications, but most of all, it is sensors that are on board with respect to leaving a radar signature. That is essentially the stealth capability that is found in a fifth generation aircraft.

• (2105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, it sounds like they chose the F-35s just because they are stealth aircraft.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, no choice has been made.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, there was no translation on the last answer of the minister.

The Chair: Would the minister please repeat his answer? There appears to have been no translation.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I answered that no choice has been made about this matter.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, if we really do need stealth aircraft, what imminent threats is Canada facing that point to the need for a stealth aircraft?

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[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I believe that we are all people of the world. We should, therefore, be wise and aware of the threats that are inherent out there, but moreover, we have an obligation to ensure Canadian sovereignty. We have obligations with NATO and Norad and other circumstances that require us to have a fully capable, competent and effective military service, which includes our Royal Canadian Air Force.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Chair, if it is a question of defending Canadian sovereignty, then why are the Americans buying Super Hornets instead of F-35s?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, these are rhetorical questions. We are not here to respond for the rationale employed by the Americans or any other nation.

We are endeavouring to act responsibly with respect to Canadians issues and with respect to Canadian sovereignty, and of course in response to the Auditor General's recommendation in following through with the seven-step action plan to fulfill his mandated requirements.

The Chair: I will now ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to speak.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Chair, as all members know, one of the roles that these estimates allow the Canadian Forces to play is to contribute to international peace and security and project Canadian leadership abroad. As the Prime Minister said, words alone will not suffice to make this possible.

As a government, with these two ministers at the forefront, we have been engaged in rebuilding Canada's armed forces to be a modern, state-of-the-art fighting force to protect Canada's role of influence in the world and to allow us to do our part when the international community decides to act and military capacity is required. Today's investments are tomorrow's capabilities.

On a day like today, May 9, the anniversary of victory in Europe, we would do well to reflect that the last three years have brought us to an operational tempo that had last been achieved by this country only in the 1950s. In addition to the G20, the Olympics and domestic missions, about which we will hear more in tonight's proceedings, we had missions in Haiti and Libya and for over a decade we had the mission in Afghanistan, which both ministers have rightly emphasized as central to the renewal of the capacity of our Canadian Forces.

A terrible earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, and 2,000 members of the Canadian Forces were deployed as an emergency task force to operate airfields, to provide help and assistance to those in need and to provide a backbone for a much larger international assistance mission.

All of these capabilities would not have been there without the investments we are talking about today, without the investments for the long term that are represented by today's estimates, particularly the procurement elements.

Let us look back over a mission with which I am most familiar among all the missions the Canadian Forces has undertaken, and that

is the mission in Afghanistan. Let us look back at the leadership role Canada has played for over a decade at every stage of that mission.

Canada protected the Kandahar airfield as early as 2002, in the very first stages of the campaign. Operation Anaconda cleared the last serious, organized forces loyal to the Taliban out of the country. Canada promoted a NATO command of ISAF in the summer of 2003 when it was not yet a mission of the North Atlantic alliance. Our Canadian Forces took over command of that mission in 2004. Canada championed the expansion of ISAF to all parts of the country to ensure that the UN mandate, that multinational mission now including over 40 countries, ultimately covered all of Afghanistan. Our Canadian Forces took on disarmament and heavy weapons confinement. We also took over a PRT in Kandahar in 2005. Our forces faced, almost alone at first, the first wave of insurgency in 2006, and then became a crucible for successful counter-insurgency in southern Afghanistan in Zhari and Panjwai and Dand Districts. Our Canadian Forces prepared the ground for a U.S.-led surge, transferring to the training mission just last year. The Canadian Forces contributed in all of these ways to a huge security gain in southern Afghanistan and across that country.

These missions were not without cost and not without sacrifice. One hundred and fifty-eight Canadian lives were lost. More than 2,000 lives were lost from allied nations, as well as tens of thousands of Afghan lives, and lives continue to be lost.

However, these sacrifices resulted in an enormous gain for that country. Afghanistan is a changed country, with a GDP per capita income ratio four times what it was when our troops first arrived. Clinics and schools blanket the country. There are new roads and infrastructure. Agriculture is on the rebound. Most important in terms of tonight's discussion is that the Afghan national security force is close to 200,000 on the army side and close to 150,000 on the national police side.

This has given the Afghan people hope. It has given Canada the rationale to focus on training. It has given all of us the possibility to talk about the transition to an Afghan lead in all parts of the country, which is under way.

There are tough days ahead and important decisions to make, but it is important on a night like tonight, when we are talking about investing in Canadian capabilities, that we not forget the achievements.

● (2110)

Those achievements also came in Libya last year. Many months of 2011 were devoted to this mission, to keeping Misrata open, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Navy, and to refuelling allied aircraft, courtesy of our air force, to analyzing Gadhafi's brutal attacks, identifying targets, flying over 10% of the attack missions over Libya in the case of Canada's current fighter fleet, and of course, one point we are all enormously proud of, through Lieutenant-General Charlie Bouchard, exercising leadership with determination, balance and wisdom.

Business of Supply

As our Minister of National Defence has said, Canadians see the value of dealing with potential international security problems upstream. That is one of the reasons we engaged not only when the going got very tough in Libya and Afghanistan, but also in operations around the world that aim to prevent conflict.

All hon. members may not know that there are 1,300 Canadian Forces members deployed around the world, not just in Afghanistan, but in 17 international missions.

[Translation]

Right now, 57 Canadian Forces personnel are stationed in the Middle East, a critical region where the Canadian Forces have been present since the Suez crisis in 1956.

These troops are participating in four operations: in the Sinai Peninsula with the multinational force and observers, created by the 1979 Camp David and Washington peace treaties; on the Golan Heights; in various other Middle East locations with the United Nations organization responsible for overseeing the truce; and in Jerusalem and on the West Bank with the Office of the United States Security Coordinator. What are we doing with the United States in those places? The Canadian Forces are overseeing and training Palestinian Authority security forces and helping coordinate security issues between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The future of the Middle East depends on creating a climate of peace and stability. Canada is helping to make that happen.

In Africa, the Canadian Forces are making an important contribution to various UN missions. For example, 14 CF personnel have been assigned to Operation Soprano, Canada's contribution to the United Nations mission in South Sudan. Nine members of the Canadian Forces are participating in Operation Crocodile, Canada's contribution to peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Maritime operations are still under way. Only last year, the members of the Canadian Forces on board HMCS *Charlottetown* participated in the NATO mission off the coast of Libya. Now, they are part of NATO's Operation Active Endeavour to prevent the movement of terrorists and weapons of mass destruction in the Mediterranean Sea.

The fact that HMCS *Charlottetown* is now in the Arabian Sea region is proof of Canada's perseverance and its ongoing determination to participate in maritime operations abroad. Five Canadians are still in Haiti, two years after the earthquake.

•(2115)

[English]

However, we have to adapt in today's complex security environment. We have to respond to new and evolving challenges, the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region in the global economy, threats in emerging domains like space and cyber, the human rights of populations under threat from conflict, failed institutions, or repressive regimes.

We cannot know all of the potential threats that Canada may face in the future, so we must continue to expect the unexpected. That is exactly what the Canada first defence strategy has tried to do. That is exactly what these estimates seek to support, sound and balanced

investments across the four key pillars of military capability: equipment, personnel, infrastructure and readiness.

Our forces deserve nothing less. Through relief and reconstruction in Haiti, through success in Libya, through progress in Afghanistan, through global partnerships in support of international peace and security, they are achieving their objectives, our objectives, magnificently.

As a former prime minister, one who I know is very dear to the memory of our current Minister of National Defence, Sir Robert Borden, once said, "We must not forget that days may come when our patience, our endurance and our fortitude will be tried to the utmost." That level of commitment has an honourable place in our history. That level of commitment has an honourable place in today's debate on these estimates, the Canadian Forces and how we as Canadians support them.

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Madam Chair, in his opening remarks, the minister mentioned the legacy of care initiative started by this government. This government will spend some \$52.5 million over five years to establish a legacy of care initiative to improve the quality of life for seriously injured personnel and their families.

Is the parliamentary secretary able to tell this committee of the whole how important this initiative is to the Department of National Defence?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Chair, it is the essential question for all of us, because without the care for Canadian Forces members and their families—those leaving for missions, those training for missions, those returning from missions—we could not accomplish any of the objectives that we have been talking about today.

There is no higher priority for this government than serving our veterans. The men and women who serve in uniform are our best and bravest. They face exceptional challenges, both in today's missions and in coping with the legacy of past missions.

As such, the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada are working in lockstep, hand in glove, to make care available to injured soldiers and their families and to address their needs in a timely, meaningful way. That is why the Minister of National Defence announced in September 2010, the government's intention to spend \$52.5 million over five years to establish a legacy of care to improve the quality of life for our seriously injured personnel and their families.

This legacy of care for those severely injured as a result of wounds received in high-risk operations includes the following measures: barrier-free transitional accommodations, support services for transitional accommodations, the Canadian Forces attendant care benefit, the Canadian Forces spousal education upgrade benefit and a caregiver benefit.

Since first being elected, this government has invested more in veterans initiatives than any government has since the end of the Second World War.

Business of Supply

• (2120)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Madam Chair, my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, rightly pointed out the importance of the role that Canada plays in protecting North America.

Communications Security Establishment Canada, CSEC, plays a key role in protecting our sovereignty. The main estimates show that this organization has become a stand-alone agency.

Can the parliamentary secretary describe CSEC's activities and their purpose and tell us what oversight process is in place to ensure that the organization's activities are legal?

Will the financial accountability and oversight of this organization still be as rigorous now that it is a stand-alone agency?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Chair, the question posed by my hon. colleague from Etobicoke—Lakeshore is very important because it relates to values that Canadians really care about: the security and integrity of our personal information. That is why it gives me great pleasure to reply.

Communications Security Establishment Canada is Canada's national cryptologic agency. It provides the Government of Canada with two key services: foreign signals intelligence in support of defence and foreign policy, and the protection of electronic information and communication.

It is important to note that CSEC does not target Canadians' communications. I probably should repeat this. CSEC does not target Canadians' communications, no matter where they live. In addition, legislative measures in effect protect Canadians' privacy. CSEC activities focus on foreign intelligence.

Oversight is provided by an independent commissioner, who is a supernumerary justice or a retired justice of a superior court. The current commissioner, Robert Décary, is a former justice of the Federal Court and the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada. He takes his responsibilities seriously, and he carries out his duties with impeccable diligence and intelligence.

To carry out this review mandate, the commissioner and his staff are guaranteed access to all CSEC personnel, information and documentation.

The commissioner's work involves the thorough review of selected CSEC activities using a variety of methods, such as monitoring control mechanisms, scrutinizing policies and procedures and how they are applied, reviewing training programs, reviewing the use of information, and reviewing the technology used to minimize the collection of information not relevant to CSEC's mandate and therefore safeguard the privacy of Canadians.

The commissioner's reports indicate that CSEC's activities over the past 16 years have been lawful. The commissioner has also confirmed that CSEC has taken steps to protect Canadians' privacy, as required by law.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Madam Chair, much reference has been made this evening to chapter 2 of the

Auditor General's spring report with respect to replacing Canada's fighter jets.

I have heard the government say that it agrees with the recommendations and conclusions of that report. Would the government confirm that for us tonight, please?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, yes, indeed, we have adopted the recommendation of the Auditor General. As a result, a secretariat has been put in place. There is a seven-point plan going forward. We are ascribing to ensure that we provide the answers that the Auditor General has required.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, in that report, did not the Auditor General conclude that the government had made a decision in 2006 effectively to purchase the F-35 fighter jet by virtue of its signature on the 2006 memorandum of understanding?

• (2125)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, no decision has been taken with regard to the purchase of the F-35. We are committed to ensuring that we continue with the joint strike fighter program, along with our other eight partner nations. We will follow through on the recommendations made by the Auditor General. A decision as yet has not been made with respect to replacing our aging CF-18s.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, I do not know how the associate minister can say that the government accepts the conclusions of the Auditor General and then stand and say the government is in fact rejecting the conclusion of the Auditor General that a decision must be made. However, that is one decision point. There is another one, too.

I quote from the Canada first defence strategy which the parliamentary secretary was just referring to, that states:

Through this 20-year plan, based on a detailed assessment of requirements, the Government has committed to renewing the Forces' core equipment platforms.

These will preserve maximum flexibility in countering the range of threats facing Canada and include...

Fighters

Starting in 2017, 65 next-generation fighter aircraft to replace the existing fleet of CF-18s.

The only next generation fighter aircraft, according to the government, is the F-35.

Here we have yet another decision point of the government saying it is going to buy 65 of these jet fighters. Would the government please confirm that for me?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I would like to confirm for the hon. member the following. We obviously have a need for fighter aircraft. Our new fighters will have to operate in an increasingly complex threat environment characterized by the proliferation of fighters on par with our current fleet, advanced surface-to-air missile systems offering better detection and greater range of action and increased lethality, and integrated air defence systems designed to deny access.

Those decisions will be made once we have the answers that the Auditor General has requested in his recommendation.

Business of Supply

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, that is two times the government made a decision to purchase the F-35 that we all know about. However, there is a third one, at least, that goes back to July 15, 2010.

I know. I have seen pictures of the Minister of National Defence hopping in and out of the cockpit of the F-35 jet and announcing at a press conference on that very day that the government had made a decision to buy the F-35—65 of them, in fact.

Could the government please confirm that actually happened?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, if I may again, I would like to remind the member that no decision has been taken. We are awaiting, as recommended by the Auditor General, the response to his concerns with regard to various issues. A secretariat has been put in place to develop independent response and validate those answers. No decision has been taken. I do not know how many more times I have to keep repeating that.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, we are really down the rabbit hole on this one because all of that has no credibility whatsoever.

That is three times we are all aware that the government made a decision to buy this fighter jet. Then it even named the very secretariat the associate minister has been referring to as the F-35 secretariat.

I will start on a new line of questioning.

How many DND and Canadian Forces staff have been assigned to the joint strike fighter office in Washington, D.C.?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I do not have that answer available immediately, but we will undertake to provide it to the member opposite.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, the associate minister has ample resources with him tonight to answer that very simple question, and I expect an answer this evening forthwith. I will give the associate minister another opportunity.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, it appears we have five staff members assigned.

• (2130)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, it seems one just has to push a little bit.

Could the associate minister or anybody from the other side please describe for us the assignments of these five staff persons? What exactly do they do there in the JSF office?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, they are basically working alongside our partner nations' personnel. There are eight other countries involved in the development of the joint strike fighter program. Our people are working in those particular areas. I do not know what more I can answer.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, every year the joint strike fighter office in Washington, D.C., provides Canada with what are termed bilateral cost breakdowns for the F-35. It provides those to the Department of National Defence. They are based on the selected acquisition reports, which I have here, from December 31, 2001. It is a very comprehensive, lengthy, detailed document.

Is our staff involved in the preparation of this Canadianized costing data?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, the answer is yes.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, how many years have we been receiving these bilateral cost breakdowns from the joint strike fighter office?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, to the member opposite, Canada has been a partner in the development of the joint strike fighter program for the last 15 years, dating back to 1997, when the Liberal government of the day engaged Canada in this particular project, which we are continuing today.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, is that to say we have been receiving bilateral cost breakdowns from that joint strike fighter office for 15 years?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, apparently the reports have been coming in since about 2001.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, that is interesting. We have over a decade's worth of Canadianized costing data coming right out of the Department of Defense in the United States.

Could the associate minister please let me know whether these bilateral cost breakdowns include life cycle costs?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, the program is led by the Americans.

The definitive Canadian costing is really what the Auditor General has recommended. We are following through on his recommendation. This is why we have put in place the independent secretariat, which will assist us with those answers. There is a seven-step action plan in place. All of these things are part of what was recommended by the Auditor General, with respect to Canadian figures.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, I can confirm that the Auditor General has identified the existence of these bilateral cost breakdowns. It is in paragraph 2.67 of his report, page 26.

However, my question is whether those bilateral cost breakdowns, which come out of the joint strike fighter office to the Department of National Defence, include life cycle costs?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, as we know from the Auditor General's findings and report, these are issues that he wished to be determined. He made a recommendation to that effect.

We are diligently working to comply. To that end, the hon. member should be respectful of this process, as we certainly are.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, we have had 11 years of bilateral cost breakdowns by the testimony provided by the Associate Minister of National Defence tonight. I have a very simple question. In those 11 years of bilateral cost breakdowns, are there or are there not life cycle costs? Or is the minister refusing to answer that question?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, the hon. member opposite needs to again reflect on the Auditor General's findings and his report. In his recommendation there are issues with respect to how figures have been compiled and reported. There are some discrepancies as he identified. We are endeavouring, in a responsible, systematic way, to make determinations which will help us make decisions.

Business of Supply

● (2135)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, no kidding. That is exactly why we are here tonight, that is exactly why I am asking that question and that is exactly why I expect a forthright response from the Associate Minister of National Defence. The time is over for hiding those costs.

The Auditor General has identified for all of us the fact that there are bilateral cost breakdowns that are put together, now we know, with the help of DND staff who come to DND every year and have been doing so for 11 years. I want to know this evening from the Associate Minister of National Defence whether they do or do not include life cycle costs.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, I would suggest that the hon. member not get too excited because he is liable to get the same answers to the truthful requirement of being respectful of the Auditor General.

The budget for the F-35 acquisition and sustainment is based on actual detailed estimates, calculations of which have been in dispute. There is no order and no decision made to acquire the F-35. We are working diligently, as was recommended, to determine those figures so as we can make informed decisions.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, if that associate minister had half the respect for this House that I have for the Auditor General, then he would be answering this question tonight forthrightly. It is a very simple question. There is lots of help sitting around the table here tonight and any one of them can answer. Do those documents that we have received for 11 years include life cycle costs, yes or no?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Madam Chair, in my earlier life I felt that citizens were respectful of due process and others. I would suggest to the member opposite that maybe he should exercise some of that.

In any event, the same recommendation also asked the department to start full life cycle planning for the preferred option in the definition phase of its project management process. Again, a lot of these things are in the works as per the recommendation of the Auditor General.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Chair, these things have been in the works for 11 years with costing data, Canadianized costing data, put together with the help of Department of National Defence officials. I have a very simple question and perhaps this member who is speaking out now has an answer but we also, I would note, have the Chief of Defence Staff around the table, we have the Deputy Minister for National Defence around the table. Surely someone on that side of the aisle will answer this very simple question for us tonight. Or are they all refusing?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I know the hon. member is having a Matlock moment and thinks he is in a court of law.

I want to clarify that these costs have been available to our department since 2006. They do not include, and this is the important nuance here, Canadian, life cycle costs.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Chair, it is great that we are able to get together tonight to discuss the estimates for national defence. It is vital for us to remember how these funds are put to use and impact upon the safety of our country.

Over the past few years the Canadian Forces have been extremely busy and Canadians have taken notice. They have seen and heard reports of the work that has been done by our troops in places like Haiti, Afghanistan and Libya. I welcome the well-deserved attention and credit it gives to our men and women in uniform. However, in many ways, it does not give a complete picture of the work they have done and what they continue to do day in and day out on our behalf and for our benefit. The primary duty of our armed forces is to protect and defend Canadians right here at home.

This sense of priority is reflected in the very title of the guiding document of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces called the Canada first defence strategy. The Canada first defence strategy lays out six core missions that the Canadian Forces members are expected to be able to perform to keep Canada and Canadians safe. Four of them relate directly to what our friends in uniform call the home game. I would like to go over each of these briefly to underscore just how much our men and women in uniform are doing for us domestically and all too often out of sight.

The Canadian Forces members stand ready and able to respond to a major terrorist attack because of their elite counterterrorism unit, the Joint Task Force Two. The unit is ready to respond at a moment's notice because of its healthy partnerships with law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

These relationships also have been extremely valuable in assisting the Canadian Forces members in another of their assigned missions: supporting a major event here in Canada. The Canadian Forces have gained experience in this over the last few years. They supported the RCMP and local law enforcement in providing security for the Vancouver Olympics. Using everything from fighter jets to skis, they monitored and helped secure 10,000 square kilometres of some of the most challenging geography in Canada. The good work helped ensure that the focus of the games stayed where it belonged: on the athletes, not on the security.

A few months later, more than 2,800 Canadian Forces personnel successfully performed a similar task when Canada welcomed world leaders to the G8 and G20 meetings.

Another core mission that the Canadian Forces have undertaken time and again is to support civilian authorities during a crisis right here in Canada. The Canadian Forces have a long tradition in this area, particularly when the crisis in question is a natural disaster. Over the last year or so, our men and women in uniform have been called upon repeatedly to help local authorities with such challenges. In May of last year, the forces responded with roughly 800 personnel to the worst flooding the Richelieu Valley and Montérégie region had seen in over a century.

Business of Supply

Simultaneously, nearly 2,000 troops and several aircraft were dispatched to help deal with the flooding along the Assiniboine River right in Manitoba, where they helped coordinate and carry out a broad effort in sand-bagging, evacuation, infrastructure protection and logistical assistance. On behalf of my constituents of Selkirk—Interlake, I want to thank the Canadian Forces again for the work they did along Lake Manitoba.

Later that summer, just under 400 soldiers were deployed to Souris, Manitoba, again to help reinforce dikes near the town in the face of yet more flooding. Members of the Canadian Forces spent much of July working to evacuate over 3,600 residents from several of Ontario's northern and first nation communities that were threatened by forest fires. I want to thank the members of the Canadian Forces for their heroic work right across Canada, giving us peace of mind knowing they are always standing by and ready to serve during times of need.

Regardless of which contingency missions the Canadian Forces may be undertaking at any given time, they are also responsible 24/7 and 365 days a year for the fourth mission laid out in the Canada first defence strategy: the conduct of daily domestic and continental operations. The activities carried out under this umbrella are as diverse as they are important. They are the ones the forces plan for in advance or that they carry out routinely. To call them routine does them no justice because they involve challenging and often dangerous tasks, such as search and rescue or sovereignty patrols in the Arctic. They include other less visible operations, such as Op Palaci, which sees regular forces and reserve soldiers provide avalanche control assistance to Parks Canada by firing artillery in and around Rogers Pass, or Operation Sabot, where military helicopters and their crews have supported the RCMP in its marijuana surveillance and eradication program. In 2011 alone, this cooperation led to the seizure of over 63,000 marijuana plants.

● (2140)

This fourth category of domestic mission also includes ongoing air defence patrols under Norad. This was another routine task that became a part of life and death on the morning of September 11, 2001. Since that day, the service performed by our fighter pilots has flown below the radar, even though Canada and U.S. fighter aircraft conduct around 200 precautionary intercepts of civilian and military aircraft every year under the direction of Norad. This close co-operation with the U.S. highlights our government's long-standing recognition that Canadian security is intrinsically linked to that of the entire continent, something that is acknowledged in the Canada first defence strategy.

In addition to their purely domestic activities, the Canadian Forces continue to work hand in hand with our single closest ally, the United States.

The defence team does this in a number of ways.

One is through Norad itself, which after more than 50 years is still the world's only binational command structure responsible to both the Governments of Canada and of the United States. It monitors and defends our aerospace and has taken on new responsibilities in keeping watch over our Maritime operations.

Another is through the Permanent Joint Board on Defense, which for over 70 years has acted as a forum for political and military engagement on a wide range of defence issues.

In today's increasingly globalized world, both Canada and the United States understand that we need to look beyond our bilateral relationship to secure a respective domestic security. That is why we are working together to build deeper partnerships in the Americas as a whole through the Inter-American Defense Board, the Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas and a trilateral meeting of Canadian, U.S. and Mexican defence ministers. We are backing up our participation in these fora with concrete co-operation in the region, like bilateral training initiatives, disaster assistance, most notably after the earthquake in Haiti, and counter-narcotic operations in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. All this activity contributes to a safe neighbourhood for Canada, which translates into safety for Canadians.

Our government has given careful thought to what our forces need to do to keep Canada and Canadians safe. These are clearly laid out in the Canada first defence strategy and our men and women in uniform have worked here at home to fulfill them. Time and again they have responded when our constituents have been in danger or need. The defence team has also gone beyond our borders to work alongside our neighbours and our regional partners, all in the interests of protecting Canadians. All of this hard work, long-standing co-operation and forward thinking has kept, and will continue to keep, our country safe. For this we owe the Canadian Forces our gratitude and the means to successfully continue their important work.

I have a couple of questions I would like to ask the Minister of National Defence.

Our men and women in uniform have established themselves as leaders in the world for their professionalism and dedication. They are respected among our allies and, in my opinion, they are second to none. Yet as proud as they are, there is no doubting that a lengthy mission, such as what we have experienced in Afghanistan, can indeed take its toll and they need us now to support them.

As chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence, I am glad to advise the House that our committee will be undertaking a study on the care of our ill and injured, both the visible and invisible injuries that plague many of our Canadian Forces members.

Last summer, the minister announced military health care infrastructure improvements in 17 Wing in Winnipeg, in my home province. Could the minister inform us as to how this initiative will ensure that our Canadian Forces personnel will continue to receive the full spectrum of first-class health care they so rightly deserve?

● (2145)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake for his leadership as chair of the defence committee and the very good news he shared with us tonight that we will have the opportunity to delve in detail to deal with the issues around health care and mental health care for the Canadian Forces.

Business of Supply

He is absolutely right when he talks about the broad array of services that are provided by the members of the Canadian Forces. They truly do stand on guard for thee. As we sit here tonight, we have members who are at the ready to respond to search and rescue, who are at sea, who continue to do important work in preparation of missions that await. We have to be there for them. There is no higher priority, I would suggest, no higher obligation for a government, for a minister of defence, than to ensure that we care for the ill and injured, and that is exactly what we do.

It is more than just money. We have seen an overall increase of \$100 million into the issues around health and mental health since we took office in 2006. This is in addition to the ongoing capital of \$439.6 million for the Canadian Forces health care.

We have a strong network across the country of programs, of infrastructure, that includes what the hon. member mentioned at 17 Wing in his province, a \$3.9 million investment in infrastructure.

To ensure the ill and injured have first-class health care so they can get the care that they need and rightly deserve, we have opened 24 integrated personal support centres, one stop shopping for the ill and the injured that will allow our personnel, our veterans, our family members to go to those locations across the country and get the help they need.

We created the “Soldier On” program to give ill and injured soldiers and members and veterans the opportunity to stay physically fit. I commend people like Master Corporal Jody Mitic and others who have shown great leadership in this program and continue to support these efforts across the country.

We have also targeted more resources in the area of mental health. There has been discussion about this. We are continuing, and in fact increasing, our support for those in need of mental health counselling. I want to say a word about the tremendous contribution made in this regard by Canadian Forces chaplains, and that includes imams and rabbis. Non-denominational support is there for the members when they need it, in addition to the professional psychologists and psychiatrists who are there as well.

We have committed to doubling the number of mental health professionals. We continue to make investments in that regard in great strides. However, as the Chief of the Defence Staff has said, there is an acute shortage across the country, so we continue to reach out to those professional associations to work with us to ensure, in particular, that reservists, who do not necessarily live on base or near base, are also able to access those important services.

On some rotations in Afghanistan, we had up to 25% participation for reservists. Therefore, this issue is not escaping our watchful eye and we continue to make these important efforts. We know that issues around mental health and suicide are of particular attention and focus. We have to ensure those who are in need of that support receive it and that they realize there is no shame in asking for that support.

Most often it is a friend, a battle buddy or a family member who pushes and encourages the member to come forward. We want to bring these issues out into the light, out into the discussion, in the public, to ensure that no stigma, no adverse inference whatsoever is applied to those who seek this important help.

I again want to commend the Chief of the Defence Staff for his personal leadership in this regard, which was recognized by the Canadian Mental Health Association with an award two years ago to the Canadian Forces.

On the physical injuries side, which my friend rightly pointed out, those with physical injuries are also being addressed. We have made important investments in cutting edge technology. The CAREN system, the computer assisted rehabilitation environment system, is now available in Edmonton and in Ottawa.

I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton Centre who pushed very hard to see that this cutting edge technology would be made available to members of the forces. He himself, a former member, a former fighter pilot in the Canadian Forces, has shown tremendous leadership during our term in office.

● (2150)

All of these investments and more, investments in health technology, information systems, infrastructure across the country at bases and wings, is a testament to our commitment each and every day.

Can we do more? Yes. Will we do more? Absolutely. There is no higher priority and we are committed to serving the needs of our ill and injured as quickly and with as much diligence as possible.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Chair, in the most recent budget, cuts to the number of Canadian Forces health care professionals were announced. These cuts will affect 15 of the 25 health care workers and 8 of the 18 epidemiologists who work mainly in the area of mental health, not to mention the section that does research into the mental health of deployed soldiers. Can the minister confirm those figures?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I thank the member for her service. I know this was part of her life that she spent in uniform and I want to thank her for that.

I will confirm that our intention is to make no reductions whatsoever in front line health providers. That includes mental health services that I just spoke of which are available across the country and continue to grow in terms of our commitment to double for the number of individuals who are in the employ of the Canadian Forces.

I can indicate that we have relocated some of the services that were available in Ottawa to a base in Petawawa so they can be more accessible and closer to those military members, their families and veterans when they need it most.

● (2155)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Chair, I would like a clarification just to be sure. Those eight of the 18 epidemiologist positions will not be cut and all 18 epidemiologists will still be employed. Is that right?

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, we have made no final determination on the numbers. What I have indicated is that there will be no change in terms of front line health care services and front line mental health services available to members across the country, not only in the Ottawa and Ontario region.

These decisions that we take across the board in many areas are difficult decisions. We have to prioritize and put the resources where they are needed most. What we hear from soldiers, their families and veterans is that they want to continue to see resources expand in the area of mental health and health services.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Chair, we heard that in the unit of epidemiologists and researchers, eight out of the 18 positions would be cut. These people do not provide a direct service to the troops, but they do research on the mental health of soldiers and they target areas for intervention. This research is even more important considering that the soldiers are often excluded from Statistic Canada's research.

I would like to know whether or not any of the epidemiologist positions have been cut.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, this is not in any way to denigrate the important contributions that are made by statisticians and individuals who study reports on mental health and information that is available about improvements occurring around the world when it comes to health and treatment. However, we are investing in and sustaining the support for core health services. That is our commitment, that is our intention and we will continue to make those important investments so soldiers, their families and veterans are able to access those resources when they need them.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Chair, again, I did not get a clear answer and I would like to have one concerning the fate of the epidemiologists. Will any positions be cut? If so, what does the minister intend to do? I am simply looking for a clear answer. I think there are enough people around the table to help him give a clear answer about the epidemiologists so that we can move on to something else.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, I can only repeat what I have just said. Our intention is to continue to make important investments in expanding the services and growing the number of health care professionals, including mental health professionals, in the employment of the Department of National Defence. We will continue to rely on information that is provided to us by statisticians, by those who are tasked specifically, but we have made it a priority to ensure that front line health services continue to grow. That is our commitment. That is the decision we have taken based on much feedback from members of the Canadian Forces.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Chair, I gave the minister four opportunities to give me a clear answer. I have still not received an answer, and I am very disappointed. I do not think it is too

complicated to say whether or not epidemiologist positions will be cut.

I will change the subject. During a recent press conference, General Natynczyk said that he would call on volunteers to serve in remote regions instead of salaried professionals.

Does the minister think that volunteers can provide adequate services to soldiers and veterans in remote regions?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, while we always accept and encourage volunteerism, we are talking about investments that include salaried positions for mental health professionals, salaried positions for those who work for the Department of National Defence, specifically for the treatment of our ill and injured.

What I am very proud of are the specific and ongoing efforts that we have within our ranks and within the department to prevent suicide. We have programs now that include primary prevention, clinic interventions and non-clinic intervention. Mental health education remains an important investment when it comes to the importance of embracing and addressing these causes.

Other important initiatives include working closely with Veterans Affairs, working with other departments and raising awareness generally. I am proud of the personal investments that our chaplains and our mental health professionals make each and every day to help our soldiers and their families.

• (2200)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Chair, I would like to know why the minister is talking about investments in our soldiers' health. Many of them are still waiting up to four months to see a psychologist.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Chair, it is because we need to continue to make improvements. That is why we have invested over 100 million additional dollars since taking office. That is why we continue to tailor programs that are specifically there to help individuals.

Is it perfect? Absolutely not. Are there challenges because of the vast size of the country and the location of soldiers, particularly reservists who may be living off base?

That is why we continue to expand these services and hire more mental health professionals. That is why we continue to grow that commitment to double the size of those in the employment of the Canadian Forces. The Be the Difference campaign in particular is a mental health awareness campaign that we have focused on that does just that. It allows us to communicate the importance, regardless of rank, regardless of whether that individual is suffering stress related to deployment or simply their job.

We really appreciate the opportunity to bring these issues out into the open. I appreciate the member's previous career in this regard.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask a few specific questions about suicide among the soldiers of the armed forces.

In 2011, 19 regular force members committed suicide. In 2010, only 12 did. The 2011 figure is the highest number of suicides committed by regular forces soldiers since 1995. The suicide rate rose 63% from 2010 to 2011. That is quite disturbing. I would like to know how the minister can explain the parliamentary secretary's comments to the effect that the suicide rate has not increased.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, what I can say, sadly, is yes, in this calendar year we have seen an increase in the number of Canadian Forces members who took their own lives. That is of enormous concern to all and it should be of concern.

The reality is that the Canadian Forces suicide rates still remain lower than the Canadian average. We cannot talk about this just in statistics because it affects every family, it affects and shatters lives whenever we lose a member of the Canadian Forces, whenever we lose a Canadian.

That is why we have continued to work toward doubling the number of mental health professionals. This is why we continue to focus specifically on issues that relate to suicide. This is why there are certain regions and bases in the country that we need to make investments in, including in Valcartier, Shilo, Petawawa and Gagetown. These are bases where we are continuing to increase the number of mental health professionals.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, it seems as though the minister's answers are longer than my questions, but I will continue nonetheless.

How many health care professionals and staff of the section doing research into the mental health of deployed soldiers are currently working on suicide prevention and treatment of post-traumatic stress?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the answer is all 378 of them. All mental health issues, I believe, in one way or another, can relate to dark thoughts that individuals might have that they may share with their mental health professionals, their psychologists, their psychiatrists or their chaplain. There is heightened awareness of the importance of dealing with these issues. There is heightened awareness of improving accessibility to these services when they are needed most.

I apologize for the length of my answers. These are important issues. They are not simple issues. They are not issues that can be answered yes or no.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, I would like to know if, in recent years, some of these positions have been eliminated and if some of them are being cut at this time. I await the minister's response.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the Department of National Defence intends to continue to increase the number of people working on this issue, in this profession. It is important to increase their numbers. That is my intention and that of all national defence staff.

• (2205)

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, if possible, I would like to ask the minister a few questions about the post living differential.

Internally, some members of the Canadian Forces clearly heard talk of major cuts to the post living differential. Some were told by their superiors to start learning to live without this allowance right away.

Can the minister confirm whether or not the post living differential is going to be abolished?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I am not sure what program she is referring to. Post-living differential is an issue that we have not made a final decision on.

I can tell her specifically what we have invested in with respect to mental health. Out of the entire health budget of the Department of National Defence, we have \$38.6 million annually spent specifically on the subject matter of mental health care and preventive programs.

We continue to make those investments at primary clinics at locations and health clinics across the country. Throughout the entire career and deployment of Canadian Forces members, these important services continue to grow. We can only do that for personnel. We can only do that by enlisting the important services available, and we continue to look for those professionals.

[Translation]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue has two minutes remaining.

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, the post living differential is an allowance that people receive when they are posted to locations where the cost of living is much higher. It helps them to compensate.

As a result of the rumours that are circulating, many military spouses have written to me because they are concerned that they will lose this allowance. The loss of this allowance would greatly affect their quality of life and could compromise their family's situation.

These people want to know whether or not this allowance is going to be cut. It is very important to give them a clear answer so that they can plan their lives and so that they do not have to wait until the last minute to know whether they will be receiving this money.

I would like a response from the minister.

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, there have been changes made in the past that allowed those allowances to be separated from their pay. They are intended to provide a cushion against expenses that are incurred when members of the Canadian Forces and their families move as a result of a new assignment. In some cases they go to a new high-cost area. Since April 1, 2011, these allowances have been disbursed as a separate payment. These changes are intended to increase understanding among Canadian Forces personnel that these allowances have a specific purpose. They are not part of their regular pay.

The cost of living is assessed annually on each major Canadian Forces base by a third party contractor. It is utilized in the calculation of the entitlement of each location. There have been changes in the way it was calculated over the years, but it is consistently reviewed to ensure fairness and equitable compensation benefits among members of the Canadian Forces to ensure they are properly compensated.

The Deputy Chair: The time has expired.

We will continue with the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to address the committee and speak to the need for continued investment in the well-being of Canadian Forces members, their families and our veterans.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I represent one of the busiest bases in the country, CFB Petawawa, the training ground of the warriors.

The women and men of the Canadian Forces do extraordinary work in defending Canada and Canadians at home and abroad, and their operational track record over the past decade is testament to the fact.

However, we all know that delivering this kind of sustained operational excellence does not come easily. It is only possible because of the professionalism, dedication and sense of duty of our military personnel and because they accept hardships, the sacrifices and the stresses that come with serving in uniform.

Of course we do everything we can to ensure the safety of CF members in the performance of their missions but no matter how well trained they are and no matter how well equipped they may be, there will always be risks involved with military personnel. That is why we also have a responsibility to provide them, and the families who support them and depend upon them, with the care and support they need throughout their career and beyond.

I am proud to be part of a government that makes our brave women and men in uniform one of its top priorities. As stated in the Canada first defence strategy unveiled in 2008, personnel are one of the four essential pillars upon which we build our military capabilities.

Since coming to office in 2006, this government has taken steps to improve the care we provide to our personnel, their families and veterans. Our approach is premised on the belief that in order to treat our ill, injured and wounded personnel effectively we must

coordinate our efforts, from recovery to rehabilitation and reintegration. For this comprehensive approach to be successful, we need to ensure that our troops, our veterans and their families can easily access services.

That is why we set up the Joint Personnel Support Unit in 2009. The JPSU is a one-stop service for ill and injured military personnel and their families through a network of 24 integrated personnel support centres on bases and wings across Canada. These centres provide much of the needed services to our military families wherever they are located by helping our ill and injured along the path to recovery and providing access to rehabilitation programs to aid in the transition to the next phase of their lives. IPFCs ensure that our troops and their loved ones have access to the same high standard of care and support across Canada.

We also recognize that we need more than infrastructure to care for our personnel and their families.

Our troops, their families and our veterans face situations that are often very complex and unique to military life. They need programs and initiatives that address these specific needs. This is especially true of those who are ill or who have been injured or wounded.

One of the first initiatives to be launched was Soldier On in 2006. Just this past weekend, the Calabogie Peaks resort hosted Ride the Valley for Soldier On. Canadian army veteran motorcycle units from across Ontario participated. This is a great program. It helps in the recovery of our ill and injured CF personnel by providing them with the opportunities to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle through sport.

This past February, the Calabogie ski resort hosted a winter sports clinic, teaching the ill and injured how to ski. In February 2013, it will be doing the same.

In the same vein, we also introduced last year the computer assisted rehabilitation environment system, or CAREN. CAREN is an advanced system that uses virtual reality software to help rehabilitate injured CF members more quickly and effectively.

● (2210)

To offer more comprehensive support not only to our ill and injured Canadian Forces members, but also to the family members who accompany them through their rehabilitation, we launched the legacy of care program in 2010. Legacy of care is designed to facilitate access to a broad range of services, such as adapted accommodation throughout the recovery process, or financial and educational assistance for family members.

Also, to provide better financial assistance to military personnel with disabilities, the Minister of National Defence announced just last month that the government is increasing the funding for the service income security insurance plan, SISIP, long-term disability program by \$113 million.

Business of Supply

Of course, this government recognizes that mental health is just as important as physical health. That is why we have also set up programs and initiatives specifically designed to address psychological or emotional issues, including operational stress injuries. To improve treatment for our personnel dealing with these problems, over 200 mental health practitioners have been hired in recent years through the Canadian Forces mental health initiative.

The CF also launched “Be the Difference”, a mental health awareness campaign that aims to build a culture of understanding for mental health issues within the Canadian Forces. Because of the great efforts we have made over recent years to address mental health issues, Canada has become a world leader in fighting the stigmatization of post-traumatic stress disorder and other operational stress injuries. I was pleased to learn that CFB Petawawa will soon have two psychologists working on the base providing services to our CF members closer to their homes.

This government recognizes that it is not enough to care for our ill, injured and wounded CF members. We must also care for their families. They courageously accept the risks, the burdens and the sacrifices that come with the service. We can never repay extraordinary service and any sacrifice our military families make, but we can work to improve their well-being. That is what this government has done since taking office.

In 2007 we set up the military families fund. This wonderful initiative provides our military families in need with short-term or long-term support, such as emergency financial assistance or educational opportunities. We have also introduced various resources, family liaison officers, the familyforce.ca website, and the family information line to easily link the families of our women and men in uniform with the information and services they need.

Of course, we have not and cannot forget about the families of the fallen. For them we introduced the shoulder to shoulder initiative in 2011. This program helps the families of our fallen deal with the tragedy of their loss by providing them with the services of counsellors and therapists, and by connecting them with volunteers who have lived through similar experiences.

After a decade of high operational tempo, the CF is now shifting its focus toward building the force of tomorrow, a force capable of meeting the challenges of an evolving and unpredictable security environment. We always remember that the foundation upon which we build this future force is our women and men in uniform and their families. They are without a doubt our most precious asset. That is why our approach to care is comprehensive, starting with the service and extending to the military families, the military life, and life after the service.

We have outlined this integrated approach in a newly released publication called, “Caring for Our Own”.

In the minister's opening remarks, he referenced the great work done by the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Canadian army.

The 1990s represented a particularly dark time for the Canadian Forces as they were put in difficult circumstances, were ill-equipped and ill-prepared, which undoubtedly had an impact on troop morale.

Since forming government in 2006, we have not only invested in the Canadian Forces through equipment and training, but have also implemented initiatives that seek to reconnect them with their proud history.

Could the Minister of National Defence inform the committee of the whole of the initiatives his department has undertaken to reconnect our Canadian Forces with their proud history and traditions?

• (2215)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, in answer to the member's question, we reinstated the names, Royal Canadian Air Force and Royal Canadian Navy. This was very well received by veterans and serving members alike. We also brought back, of importance operationally but also for the Canadian Forces, joint task force 2, which really is the successor special forces to the airborne regiment which was disbanded by the previous Liberal government. We also know that in 1968 those royal designations were stripped away, along with the individual uniforms and individual identities of Canadian Forces.

I want to commend the hon. member. I know she is extremely proud of the men and women at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa. The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is an ardent supporter of the men and women in uniform and their families.

I also would take this opportunity to express appreciation not only to the families but to one family member in particular, and that is Leslie Natynczyk, who is the wife of the Chief of the Defence Staff. She was recently recognized with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal for her incredible work in supporting wounded members, ill and injured, and their families. She is an outstanding Canadian, as is her husband. We are very proud of her work and contribution, in addition to what General Natynczyk does for the men and women in our forces.

• (2220)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, over the past year the Department of National Defence has entered into several memoranda of understanding with other nations to build upon relations between the host nation and Canada. Such partnerships offer not only the Canadian Forces but the Canadian population in general cost-effective measures to provide logistical support to our forces. I am referring specifically to the partnership forged with the government of Germany.

Could the minister provide this committee of the whole with more information about how those arrangements are made and why it is so important to have partnerships of this nature?

Business of Supply

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, specifically, in April 2009 the Canadian Forces established a proof of concept hub in Spangdahlem, Germany. This was done on May 13, 2010. The Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff ordered the establishment of seven operational support hubs worldwide to enable enhanced logistics reinforcement of international missions. This is an important step being taken by the Canadian Forces. The engagement and dialogue with host nations are progressing. We continue to develop appropriate instruments to establish the operational support hubs worldwide. The engagement and dialogue with host nations will allow us to have these operational hubs, which we feel are very important in a volatile and changing world.

On February 14 of this year, the German defence minister and I announced the move of the European operational support hub to Köln-Bonn airport. This initiative is about supporting funds more effectively, ensuring that this network of hubs is going to be there and available for us. It often involves simply using a corner of an airfield, a hangar, for storage purposes but it will allow Canadian Forces to improve its operational capability, to get where it needs to be quickly. As I said, challenges and flare-ups can occur, as we have seen in places around the world. This is very much about the Canadian Forces having a footprint in places and regions where we know that Canadians will be able to play an important role, where the world is looking to Canada to do more, and we are ready to shoulder that load.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would say to the government members opposite that it might be easier if they had a copy of the Auditor General's report because I am going to be asking very direct questions based on paragraphs from the Auditor General's report.

On page 21, at paragraph 2.50, the Auditor General says:

As described in the following paragraphs, we observed that in the lead-up to this announcement, required documents were prepared and key steps were taken out of sequence. Key decisions were made without required approvals or supporting documentation.

Does the minister support that conclusion of the Auditor General?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, we have accepted the findings and the recommendation made by the Auditor General. We are acting with diligence to fulfill the recommendation as he conveyed in his report.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, then I assume that key decisions were made without required approvals or supporting documentation.

At the end of paragraph 2.57, it states:

—the formal options analysis was completed...which concluded that the F-35 was the only available aircraft that could meet the mandatory requirements of the Canadian Forces. The conclusion was cited as the basis for the government's decision to purchase the F-35 without competition.

Is that still the position of the Government of Canada?

• (2225)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the position of the government is that we have not signed any contract for the purchase of replacement aircraft. We have been clear that we have set a budget and we will work within that budget. A new secretariat is being established that will play the lead coordinating role as the government moves to make a decision to replace the aging CF-18s.

We will not proceed with any purchase until the seven-step action plan we have outlined is completed and developmental work is sufficiently advanced.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, the critical issue is the government decided to proceed without a competition. The Auditor General found clearly and categorically that the government proceeded without a competition, and that things were done out of sequence and were done without the proper authorization.

The Prime Minister stated last year, and this quote is from the March 11, 2011 issue of the *Globe and Mail*:

This is the option that was selected some time ago, because it is the only option available. This is the only fighter available that serves the purposes that our air force needs.

Is that still the position of the Government of Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, when this information is put forth, it is assumed, I suppose, by the hon. member that people bite.

The reality is it was his government that began the process. It was his government that put Canada, along with eight other nations, into the joint strike fighter program.

Prior to project approval, the Treasury Board Secretariat will first commission an independent review of the Department of National Defence acquisition and sustainment estimates, which will be made public.

Ultimately, we will provide the Canadian Forces with the proper aircraft they need to do the important job we ask of them.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, I am not going to bite either, I can tell the minister. He knows full well that I am simply reading from the Auditor General's report, and I am asking whether or not the government still agrees with that position.

I just read a quote from the Prime Minister of Canada, with whom I think the minister will be familiar. He said that this plane is the only plane available, that this is the only fighter that would serve the needs of our air force.

In paragraph 2.60, the Auditor General said:

Practically speaking, by 2010, Canada was too involved in the JSF Program and the F-35 to run a fair competition.

Does the minister agree with that finding?

If I could have the minister's attention, I know he is talking to colleagues which is fine, but I would ask the minister, is that a fair finding by the Auditor General? Does the government agree with it? If it does, what kind of a competition is it in fact running now? Is it not all just a big charade?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, we accept the recommendation made by the Auditor General. We are acting on it.

Business of Supply

If I may, this initiative will provide the Department of National Defence, as well as Canada's aerospace industry, with an excellent opportunity to be involved in one of the most exciting aerospace programs of the 21st century. "Our participation will greatly enhance the interoperability with our allies which is one of our key defence objectives." Who said that? The Hon. Art Eggleton on February 7, 2002.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, members can read the Auditor General's report. It is very clear. The Auditor General clearly found that up until 2006, no decision had been made with respect to the purchase of the F-35. The F-35 decision was made in 2010 by the government sitting over there. That is clearly documented in the Auditor General's report.

If the parliamentary secretary would stop heckling for a moment, the critical question today is, is there a competition with respect to the replacement of the CF-18, or is the government's so-called seven-step exercise simply an effort to justify the decision that the Auditor General reported has already been made?

This is a very critical fact for the government to tell us the answer.

● (2230)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the member opposite may be entitled to his opinion but he is not entitled to invent his own facts.

The Government of Canada has taken action to ensure that due diligence, oversight and transparency are firmly embedded in the process to replace Canada's aging fighter aircraft. We are following a seven-step action plan to fulfill and exceed the Auditor General's recommendations. This includes freezing acquisition funding and establishing a separate secretariat to lead this project, and its work has already begun.

As a result, the government is taking seven steps to fulfill and exceed the Auditor General's recommendations, and I can itemize those for him. In any event, no decision has been taken and we will await the findings of the secretariat before we make any definitive decisions.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, let me ask the minister this direct question. Is the seven-step process a review of the decision that was taken with respect to the purchase of one aircraft, which is the F-35, or is the seven-step process an opportunity for others to come forward with respect to a competition and for the government to review once again the fundamental question of whether the F-35 should be the plane that we acquire. Which is it?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to convey to the hon. member opposite what the seven steps are: one, the funding envelope allocated for the acquisition of the CF-18 replacement fleet has been frozen; two, National Defence, through the secretariat, will provide annual updates to Parliament and the Canadian public; three, National Defence will continue to evaluate options to sustain the Canadian Forces fighter capability well into the 21st century; four, Treasury Board will commission an independent review on costs; five, Treasury Board will ensure procurement policies are followed and properly executed; six, Industry Canada will identify the economic opportunities and benefits; and seven, a secretariat will be established.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, I will try again. The Auditor General clearly found that a decision was made in July 2010, a decision that

was made out of sequence, without adequate facts, without adequate justification and without the documentation required to make such a decision.

What I am trying to find out is whether the government is in fact conducting a competition with respect to the replacement or is the government simply reviewing its own decision with respect to the F-35. Does the government stand by the Prime Minister's comments a year ago when he said, "This is the option that was selected some time ago, because it is the only option available?" Is the F-35 the only option available and being taken seriously by the government, yes or no?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the fact is that one of the aspects of the moving forward strategy is to continue to evaluate options available to us. I again want to emphasize the fact that we have taken serious action with respect to the Auditor General's recommendations. We are following those steps in order to ultimately arrive at a decision based on facts and not speculation.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, I will try one more time.

[*Translation*]

I will try to ask the minister the question very clearly in my second language. Is there a competition where all the options are on the table? You talk about transparency. That is transparency.

On the contrary, is the F-35 still the only option? What you are in the process of doing is looking at the costs so far.

Is the F-35 in competition with other planes, or is it the only plane on the table? I am asking a simple question.

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the simple answer is that National Defence will continue to evaluate options to sustain the Canadian Forces' fighter capability well into the 21st century. That is what we said we would do and that is what we will do.

● (2235)

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, last year, the Prime Minister of Canada said:

This is the option that was selected some time ago, because it is the only option available. ... This is the only fighter available that serves the purposes that our air force needs.

Is that or is it not still the position of the Government of Canada?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the position of the Government of Canada is that we have accepted the Auditor General's recommendation and we are following that recommendation.

The fact is that the third step in the seven step plan is that National Defence will continue to evaluate options to sustain a Canadian Forces fighter capability well into the 21st century and that is what we are doing.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chair, the first step in the ten step program that I am familiar with is that we first must admit that we have a problem. I do not see a hope for recovery in that seven-step program until the government admits it has a problem.

If the Auditor General said that the government has a problem, it is because it has things out of sequence. It decided to go for the F-35 without a competition, without the documentation, without a proper decision by cabinet and without cabinet having the information that it needed to have because the Auditor General said that important information was withheld from the cabinet, withheld from the government and withheld from Parliament.

Will the government finally accept that it has a problem and that it requires a review that goes back to the original question? What is the mission for this aircraft? What do we need the aircraft to do in the years after 2020? What is the most efficient and fair-minded way to do it? Why not finally accede to having a competition rather than not having a competition?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I am surprised at the bantering by the member opposite but I respect his point of view. What he needs to do is research his own party's edict for why it is that Canada is now engaged in this process. It was his government that signed Canada up to this multinational joint strike fighter program. He should be acquainted with those answers.

The member needs to remember that we will ascribe to the recommendation made by the Auditor General. We will ascertain the facts that he chose as necessary in decision making going forward. We are moving forward with that seven-step action plan.

The member opposite needs to be respectful of the Auditor General's findings.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, the government understands that in order to carry out the varied and difficult missions in the service of our country, the Canadian Forces need to have four important things: healthy, well-trained and motivated personnel; the right mix of equipment; the right portfolio of properly maintained physical infrastructure; and a high level of operational readiness.

That is why, in 2008, we made those elements the four pillars of the Canada first defence strategy, CFDS. It is our blueprint for building modern forces adaptive to the security challenges of the 21st century. The Canada first defence strategy outlines a 20 year investment plan to ensure that the Canadian Forces have the capabilities and the flexibility to continue serving Canadians in a security environment that is all but predictable.

The government recognizes that people are our most important asset. As a former commanding officer of a reserve infantry unit, I know that to be especially true when we consider the intense operational tempo of the past years.

Since taking office in 2006, the government increased the size of the regular force by 5,000 to reach 68,000 personnel. This allowed us to sustain our operations in Afghanistan where we deployed more than 40,000 troops over a decade, and that includes the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East who served there in 2007.

We also relied heavily on our reservists. In Afghanistan alone, approximately 6,000 reservists have served alongside the regular force, sharing the same stress, the same dangers and the same risks.

Now that our operational tempo has slowed down, the government is taking steps to ensure that reservists are provided with adequate career transition support to facilitate their return to part-time service. In the same vein, the hon. members are fully aware that our high operational tempo has been hard on our troops and their families.

That is why we have taken many steps to improve the support we provide them, from additional funding to help with their treatment of mental and physical injuries, to initiatives aimed at improving assistance to our military families in need and programs to support the families of our fallen.

Of course, all the support we provide our personnel does not amount to much if we do not also provide them with the tools they need to do their jobs. Having the right equipment is what allows our troops to serve us to the best of their ability and it is what helps keep them safe.

This is something that the government has recognized since the day it took office in 2006. At the time, our troops were dealing with a fierce insurgency in the Kandahar region. To ensure their safety and operational success, we acquired critical capabilities, like the C-17 Globemaster III, strategic lift aircraft, Chinook helicopters and Leopard 2 tanks. These acquisitions have made a difference to our campaign against the insurgency and have saved Canadian lives.

Through CFDS, we continue strengthening the Canadian Forces by providing them with the right mix of capabilities across all three environments: on land, on water and in the air. On land, we have invested \$1 billion to upgrade our fleet of third generation LAV III fighting vehicles which form the backbone of our mechanized infantry.

The upgrade of the LAV III is one of the components of a larger investment in our family of land combat vehicles program. through which we will acquire other capabilities, fleets of close combat vehicles and tactical armoured patrol vehicles. We are giving the army the tools it needs to effectively and safely conduct operations ranging from combat missions and counter insurgency to peace-keeping and domestic crisis response.

To renew our capabilities at sea, we established a national shipbuilding procurement strategy, a \$33 billion investment to replace our aging naval fleet and equip the Royal Canadian Navy with a new generation of surface combatants, joint support ships and Arctic off-shore patrol ships. This will allow our sailors to continue their critical work of exercising our sovereignty, protecting our coasts and defending our interests abroad.

Business of Supply

To ensure that the Royal Canadian Air Force has the tools it needs to operate in the 21st century, the government is looking to replace the fleet of aging CF-18s with a fighter aircraft that will give the Canadian Forces the flexibility to meet the challenges of the evolving uncertain and unpredictable security environment of the next decades.

That is why we committed to purchasing a next generation fighter capability in the Canada first defence strategy, and we remain true to that commitment.

We have also increased our investments in our third pillar, infrastructure. Having the right training facilities, landing strips, roads, docks, buildings, utilities and accommodations is absolutely essential to the work of the Canadian Forces. That is why, as part of the Canada first defence strategy, we committed to replace or refurbish approximately 25% of our holdings within 10 years and 50% within 20 years. In line with this commitment, the Department of National Defence has announced over \$3 billion in defence infrastructure projects across the country since March 2009.

● (2240)

In the past two years alone we have initiated close to 100 projects. They include investments that directly support the operational effectiveness of our troops, such as research centres, training facilities or hangars to accommodate the new equipment. They also include infrastructure projects that provide better support to our men and women in uniform, like access to proper housing or new integrated personnel support centres on bases and wings across Canada.

While these are only a few examples, they illustrate just how far-reaching our efforts in renewing defence infrastructure have been and how important it is for us to keep investing in projects and make a real difference in the work of our troops. These investments in personnel, equipment and infrastructure must be complemented by a focus on readiness to ensure that we sustain the ability of the Canadian Forces to respond when called upon. Readiness is the difference between success and failure.

We are not only talking about how quickly the Canadian Forces can respond, we are also talking about their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The government knows that one of the keys to readiness is to conduct regular, real-world training. That is why, for example, since 2007, the Canadian Forces conducts an annual sovereignty and security operation in the north, known as Operation Nanook, with its whole-of-government partners and more recently with international allies like the U.S. and Denmark.

Operations like this ensure that our troops remain prepared to meet whatever challenge comes their way. We need to maintain the same kind of readiness that we have displayed both at home and abroad over the past 10 years.

This level of readiness excellence sustained through sound investments is what allowed our troops to bring much needed humanitarian assistance to Haiti after it was struck by a devastating earthquake in January 2010, to intervene at the side of our allies to protect Libyan civilians last year and to quickly come to the aid of survivors when First Air Flight 6560 crashed in Resolute Bay last August so tragically. That is why we will continue our efforts to help

the Canadian Forces members ensure that they arrive in ready condition whenever and wherever we need them.

By supporting the work of our troops at home and abroad, our investments through the Canada first defence strategy have produced tangible results for Canadians. It is important to continue to deliver on our commitments we made in the strategy.

Of course, we are mindful of the economic climate. We are taking steps to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of National Defence to ensure that we get the most out of every dollar invested. We cannot forget that we have a responsibility to continue building a modern and agile force suited for the security challenges of tomorrow. As we move forward with the Canada first defence strategy, we will continue to maintain our emphasis on investments in personnel, equipment, infrastructure and readiness.

I have a couple of questions for the Associate Minister of National Defence.

In 2009, as part of our Canada first defence strategy, the Government of Canada announced its plan to acquire the next generation of land combat vehicles. The family of land combat vehicles program, valued at approximately \$5 billion, consists of the acquisition of three new fleets and the upgrade of the fleet of third generation light armoured vehicles, valued at an estimated \$1 billion. I understand that upgrades will be performed on 550 vehicles and that this contract is a great long-term use for the industry and the economy. I was hoping that the Associate Minister of National Defence could further update us on this project and explain why the upgrade is necessary.

● (2245)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I feel a sense of duty to acknowledge the service to Canada or Canadian armed forces by the hon. member. I want to thank him for his dedication to duty, having served honourably as he has for many years.

The light armoured vehicle is the Canadian army's primary fighting vehicle. It is used for quickly and safely moving infantry on the battlefield, combining defensive protection and firepower necessary to protect against such threats as mines and improvised explosive devices.

Major upgrades to the light armoured vehicles will dramatically improve the safety of our soldiers. As operating environments and future threats evolve, the Canadian Forces must be prepared to counter threats through the improvements in our vehicles and equipment. We are doing that on an ongoing basis. These improvements have been influenced by lessons learned during recent operations in Afghanistan as well as technological advancements. The light armoured vehicle upgrades will provide our troops with improved protection, mobility, firepower and surveillance in order to safely and effectively carry out their missions.

The vehicles receive a completely new lower hull, including engine, transmission, wheels, suspension and mine-resistant protection. In addition, the turret will receive a major redesign, and new fire control systems for the gunner and commander. These upgrades ensure that the light armoured vehicle remains a truly state-of-the-art combat vehicle.

The first vehicles will be delivered to the army within a year. I am proud to say that hundreds of hard-working, skilled Canadians are making these improvements in factories in London, Edmonton and across Canada. I had the great honour and privilege of being among them as we unveiled this new program, dedicated to making our men and women in uniform safer as they engage in very difficult and dangerous circumstances.

Mr. Ted Opatz: Mr. Chair, the Conservative government is often criticized by the NDP for working with our allies on programs like the joint strike fighter. By working with our allies we can save money, share technical expertise, mutually benefit from shared knowledge and undertake projects that would have been cost-prohibitive for us to do alone.

The Mercury Global project is another international project that the associate minister has been involved with. This project is critical to ensuring that our military members can communicate effectively to do their job and to complete their mission successfully. Could the associate minister please tell us about this project, who is involved and was it delivered on time and on budget?

• (2250)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, Canadian Forces missions in Afghanistan and Libya highlight the secure exchange of information between headquarters. Formation of units is a critical part of the success of modern military operations. The Government of Canada is participating with its military allies in the Wideband Global Satcom system, also known as Mercury Global. This partnership provides Canada with access to satellite systems, further strengthening secure communications during our missions and cooperation with our closest military friends and allies around the world.

It enables Canada to be a part of a global satellite system of additional bandwidth and communications capabilities, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and combat support information necessary for missions today. This agreement will not only support Canadian Forces' requirements for strategic satellite communications for the next two decades, it will also be at a lower cost than the Canadian Forces would pay to maintain the status quo.

This is yet another example of our government's leadership. It demonstrates how we continue to provide value to taxpayers. At a cost of \$337.3 million over the 20-year timeframe, Mercury Global represents a significant cost saving over planned expenditures on short-term lease of satellite communications capabilities.

Finally, this forward-thinking, decades-long approach is indicative of the careful consideration that National Defence and the Canadian Forces take when dealing with taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Ted Opatz: Mr. Chair, I have a question for the Minister of National Defence.

The issue of infrastructure has been discussed earlier in these proceedings, but I would be remiss not to add the western

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perspective to this discussion. In March of this year the minister announced a new \$54 million building will accommodate the Land Force Western Area Headquarters, Joint Task Force West Headquarters and 1 Area Support Group Headquarters. This is in addition to the announcement of \$3.6 million for 4 Wing in Cold Lake, Alberta in September, 2010 to modernize key infrastructure at the base.

Sir, how will this new building and infrastructure programs like these achieve the government's overall objective of ensuring the efficient and effective use of Canadian taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I know you have diligently, throughout the evening, been reminding members that they should address questions to the Chair, but this member insists on calling him sir, asking him questions and speaking to him directly, instead of directing questions to the Chair.

I wonder if he could be reminded of his obligation?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member is correct that all comments ought to be directed to the Chair.

The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, with respect to aging infrastructure, we have a number of bases and infrastructure projects ongoing across the country. In fact, in the last six years or more we have invested roughly \$3 billion in addressing some of these infrastructure needs.

In response to the question, with respect to the new accommodations at Canadian Forces Edmonton, it is no different than some of the other investments that we have made. This is for Land Force Western Area Headquarters. The result will be a more integrated, better coordinated command team that can coordinate and lead domestic operations in western Canada. They can track Canadian Forces operations and personnel around the world. Our largest base at CFB Edmonton has contributed mightily with respect to the Afghanistan mission and other deployments. Also, this new infrastructure will provide timely and seamless information in support of senior military and government decision makers, as well as communicate those decisions effectively.

All of these efforts are about improving this base. The construction of this new facility in Edmonton, by Pentagon Structures, will be providing 161 local jobs. This is true of all of these infrastructure investments. They have a tremendous impact on the local economies, and these investments are felt at a time like this.

The Deputy Chair: This completes the time for the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre.

The hon. member for Saint John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have another opportunity to ask some questions of the ministers and officials opposite.

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I know that the members opposite are fond of referring to the Liberal era, previous to them as the “decade of darkness” when it comes to military equipment and equipping the Canadian Forces. Would the minister not agree that we are now, and have been, in what I would call “an interval of incompetence” when it comes to acquiring equipment for our Canadian Forces?

I will start with a few examples, such as the cancellation of the joint support ship program in August 2008 at the 11th hour and 59th minute of awarding a contract. We now are not going to have the first ship of the joint supply program until 2018, a 10-year delay. There is a six-year delay in the acquisition of the Chinook helicopter program, with the failure to comply with its own tendering, according to the Auditor General.

There was the failure to put forth a fixed-wing SAR procurement program that actually followed its own rule to the point that that was also shut down, with yet another delay for the acquisition of fixed wing, which is desperately needed because of our 50-year-old Buffalos, which are supposedly ending their lifespan in 2015. We will not have any replacements there until the earliest projected date of 2017. We have a total reset on the closed combat vehicle procurement, just announced the other day. Again, this is because the government failed to follow a proper procurement procedure. Of course, we have the debacle of the F-35s, which we are discussing in great detail tonight and the Auditor General has commented so roundly on.

Would either minister, or both ministers, agree that we have a serious problem in the Department of National Defence with respect to acquisition programs? They cannot seem to get it right. They do not seem to be able to follow the rules. We have a serious problem. Would he not agree with that, and will he do something to fix it? Is he going to tell us what his government and his department are going to do to fix this problem so they can get it right and do what they say they want to do, which is to make sure we have the right equipment for our forces?

• (2255)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the premise that the hon. member put forward is absolutely fraught with misinformation, miscommunication and misunderstandings. I give him charity for that.

However, let me inform the hon. member opposite of facts. The Globemaster project, delivered; the C-130J Hercules project, delivered; lightweight towed Howitzers, delivered; medium to heavy lift helicopters implementation, in progress; fixed-wing search and rescue, in definition phase; Arctic offshore patrol ships, in definition phase; joint support ships, in definition phase; Canadian surface combatants, in definition phase; force mobility enhancement, in implementation; light armoured vehicle LAV III upgrades, in implementation; tactical armoured patrol vehicle, definition; medium support vehicle, definition; tank replacement project, implementation; military personnel management capability transformation, definition.

Mr. Chair, I am proud of the work that we are doing to support our men and women in uniform. With the NDP, none of this would happen. It is totally and absolutely non-supportive of any assets for our military.

The Deputy Chair: Before I go back to the member for St. John's East, I would like to remind all hon. members that the answer to questions put ought to be of similar duration to the question. My colleague, the chair of committee of the whole, made that point in advance, but I would like to remind all hon. members.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I am not surprised that the member mentioned the acquisitions of the Globemaster and the Hercules. It is not that hard to buy things that are already built and in production. They can be bought off the shelf. In the case of the Globemaster, it was an advanced contract award. They were bought six months after the decision was made to buy them. Buying things off the shelf is easy, but doing the things that the government cannot do and that it has messed up is hard. That is why everything else is in progress.

Let me mention an acquisition that I am particularly interested in seeing done properly. It is based on a letter to the Minister of National Defence on October 2009 and signed by General Natynczyk, who is here with us today, regarding the rotary search and rescue aircraft.

We acquired 15 Cormorants in 2004. They were deployed around the country, including to Trenton Air Force Base. In 2005 it was decided that they would be replaced, on the condition that it was temporary, by CH-146 Griffons, which are less adequate than the Cormorant for the search and rescue role. This was due to the unavailability of the Cormorant fleet that had been promised by the manufacturer.

Could the minister tell us the percentage of availability of a Cormorant aircraft as we speak today? What percentage of a time is a Cormorant helicopter available to task for search and rescue?

• (2300)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, what I can tell my hon. friend is that we have increased dramatically the serviceability of that aircraft, in part because we bought spares; that is, we bought aircraft that were used and available for the presidential fleet in the United States. By virtue of that purchase we now have parts to upgrade the current fleet of Cormorant aircraft.

The member will know this particular procurement has a bit of a long and, I dare say, tortured past. As a result of the cancellation of the Sea King replacement, there was a split in the maritime helicopter program and the search and rescue helicopter program. That was something we inherited. We continue to deal with this issue with respect to the replacement of the Sea King.

The CH-148 Cyclone helicopter replacement is also an ongoing procurement. We hope to take delivery of an aircraft as soon as this summer. This will be the first in a number of aircraft that are going to eventually replace the entire fleet of Sea Kings, which will be in their 50th year.

There is an example of a procurement that went particularly bad during the decade of darkness that the member spoke of earlier in his remarks.

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Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I am asking specifically about the Cormorants and their availability. I have heard availability figures in the range of under 50%, perhaps in the range of 40%. Would the minister confirm that number as of now, as we speak today? What is the availability of the Cormorant aircraft?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I do not have the specific availability. It has improved as a result of those parts acquisitions and as a result of the incredible work done by maintenance crews on both Cormorants and Sea Kings, and we continue to see improvements in the use and availability of the Cormorant.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I am sure someone here tonight, whether here in front of us or behind the curtain, knows the answer to that question. I wonder if the minister would undertake to make that available to the committee tonight.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Yes, of course, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I raise this report because General Natynczyk says in this letter that this is the result of a study done and presented to the minister himself in 2009. The study indicates that it would be possible to return and sustain four CH-149 main operating bases after two to three years. In other words, Cormorants would be back at Trenton for proper service by means of a variety of initiatives, each of which would supply some relief.

In this report there are 14 recommendations to reach that goal in two to three years. Here we are three years later, and there are still no Cormorants at Trenton. The Cormorant is a faster aircraft, with a greater range. It is a more capable aircraft, particularly for at-sea rescues in the north and on the Great Lakes.

Were those 14 recommendations followed? Why are Cormorants not operating at Trenton today?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I can tell the hon. member that we have an array of military assets that are used throughout the country in the central region. At that particular base, the combination of Griffon helicopters and CC-130 Hercules aircraft fits the bill for our requirement. All Canadian Forces assets, particularly air assets, can be assigned for search and rescue purposes at various times, given the need, and in response to certain incidents.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, it is all very well to say we have a variety of aircraft.

This report talks about the concern, expressed by General Natynczyk, that the Cormorants have been taken away and need to be put back. They are the helicopter of choice. There needs to be a program to do that.

There was talk about acquiring new ones. We know the government has since then bought nine complete helicopters from the U.S. government in the last year for \$125 million, which is a bargain basement price after the U.S. government spent \$3 billion on the program. Why is the government not seeking to use those or to convert them into search and rescue helicopters?

• (2305)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the hon. member will know that we lost one Cormorant helicopter to a crash on the east coast. This was part of the impetus and motivation to go out and get those parts.

If the hon. member is suggesting that we should build functioning helicopters with these parts, that is simply not possible. We purchased them specifically to improve the serviceability of the existing fleet.

As I mentioned earlier, we have a number of Canadian Forces air assets that are used on occasion for search and rescue. We have the Cyclone helicopters that are going to be coming into use in the near future. We have other assets, such as Twin Otters that are stationed in Yellowknife.

The Canadian north is a tremendous area of search and rescue responsibility. We are improving our assets as well as our capabilities there, and we will continue to make those investments.

Of course, as the hon. member also mentioned earlier this evening, we have an procurement outstanding with respect to fixed-wing search and rescue. We are pursuing that necessary capability as well.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, could the minister give me a yes or no answer on this, please? I think he suggested that some of the Cyclones will be configured for search and rescue and used as part of the search and rescue fleet. Is that what the minister was implying?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I in no way, shape or form made that indication.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, I thought the minister was trying to get us to believe that without actually saying it, so I am glad he clarified it.

Why did the government not consider this? We know it acquired, for \$125 million, nine aircraft. They are called VH-71 Kestrels. I understand some or all of them are being cannibalized for parts. The department made no attempt to study the cost of converting or reconfiguring some of them to search and rescue capabilities. They are the exact same size, have the exact same load weight and have engines very similar to those in the Cormorants. Why was no study undertaken to make them into search and rescue aircraft to replace the ones in Trenton and the one that was lost, sadly, with the loss of three lives. It was a very sad occurrence. I think three of the gentlemen were from Newfoundland and Labrador.

There was and still is an opportunity to invest in a program to replace those search and rescue helicopters in Trenton, to make some more available to increase our capability in the north with proper search and rescue helicopters.

Why is the government not doing that? It is not even investigating the costs of doing that.

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Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, as I indicated a number of times now, this capability was to improve the spares and the serviceability of the existing fleet. While they may have the same airframe and some—some—of the same capabilities, such as a hoist, this is not the purpose for which these particular helicopters were designed. In fact, they are spares. They are boxes of parts, essentially, and certainly not assembled for the purposes of search and rescue.

I come back to the issue of Cyclones, though. All Canadian Forces air assets can be used—commandeered, if you will—on occasion, if necessary, for the purposes of search and rescue. That is a commonly known fact within the Canadian Forces.

Most importantly, though, let us spend some time talking about the SAR techs themselves and what they are able to do. These individuals give so freely of themselves and are so prepared to go above and beyond. They are fearless to a fault. They exhibit daily courage. The training regimen is akin to what Olympic athletes do, and it allows them to perform these feats of courage and heroics in terrible conditions in response to search and rescue incidents that occur with frequency across the country. They often put themselves at great risk in response to those calls.

I want to report to the hon. member, in response to an earlier question, the serviceability is approximately 60%, meaning that eight of the 14 Canadian Forces CH-149s are available on any given day.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am grateful for this opportunity to address the committee of the whole and to add my voice to those who have already expressed their support for the men and women of the Canadian Forces. It is good to be here with my colleagues, the Minister of National Defence and the Associate Minister of National Defence, as well as General Natynczyk. Perhaps the greatest honour in my young political career came when I joined the general in Esquimalt to welcome home the HMCS *Vancouver* and her crew from their deployment in Libya. I thank the general for being there for that.

As we know, the primary responsibility of the Canadian Forces is to protect and defend Canada. This is a vast country, covering 10 million square kilometres and bordered by over 200,000 kilometres of coastline. These numbers are staggering, and it is awe-inspiring to think that roughly 40% of the land mass and 75% of the coastline is contained in our rugged Arctic.

This region has an important historical and symbolic significance to the cultural makeup of our country. As we know, with each passing year more and more northern Canadians are affected, one way or another, by their changing environment. As waterways are becoming increasingly navigable, traffic into and through their region is on the increase. The potential for new transportation and trade routes is becoming a reality, just as the desire, from both inside and outside of Canada, to access the vast resources found in the Arctic increases.

Obviously this is a time of tremendous and, some would say, unequalled opportunity. Mindful of that opportunity, in 2009 our government released its northern strategy on behalf of all Canadians, from the north and the south, to ensure that together we could carefully monitor and protect our Arctic environment, promote and support both economic and social development in the north, improve and devolve governance so that more decision-making is in the

hands of northerners and continue exercising Canada's sovereignty in the north so that we can deliver on these goals.

To achieve this vision, our government is working through provincial, territorial and local governance structures. Our government is working with northern Canadians so that they can achieve sustainable improvements to their economic, environmental and social well-being over the long term and exercise the same kind of control over their own future as Canadians do in any other part of the country.

● (2310)

The National Defence team plays a valuable supporting role in the north, collaborating seamlessly with northern communities and with other government departments such as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and learning from northern residents about how to work and survive in this beautiful and often forbidding part of our country. They have tapped into this fountain of knowledge and experience through the Canadian Rangers program. The Rangers, made up of over 4,000 Canadians of mostly Inuit, first nations and Métis descent, give the Canadian Forces an important and permanent presence in the north. They exercise our sovereignty by reporting unusual activities, collecting local data in support of the Canadian Forces and patrolling our country's Arctic.

Just last month, they and a number of their military colleagues wrapped up Operation Nunavut, which saw them conduct sovereignty patrols over thousands of kilometres in some of the most remote and inhospitable land on earth. The Rangers also play a valuable role in mentoring and educating troops from the south about how to manage, respect and, ultimately, care for the north. Clearly, they are crucial to Canada's Arctic. This is why our government has taken steps to give them new equipment—including new GPS units, radios, binoculars and survival equipment—to help them better perform their important role. It is why we are committed to expanding the Canadian Ranger program to over 5,000 members, a target our government has made great progress on in the last five years and one that it is now close to meeting.

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We are also looking beyond our borders for partners, because we have learned that partnership is not only a way of life in the north, it is the key to success. That is why we recently worked through the Arctic Council to establish a legally binding Arctic search and rescue agreement, something the Canadian Forces continue to lead on, including through a multinational tabletop exercise hosted by Canada last fall. It is why the Chief of the Defence Staff recently hosted a meeting of his counterparts from other northern countries to discuss issues of common interest, particularly support to civilian authorities, and it is why we regularly invite our Arctic neighbours to participate in some of our military training in the region, most notably Operation Nanook, our largest annual Arctic exercise.

• (2315)

This exercise showcases our sovereignty as the Canadian Forces brings together local, territorial and federal stakeholders and it highlights the need for co-operation in a place where no one can hope to succeed alone.

This fact was tragically reinforced during last year's Operation Nanook when First Air flight 6560 crashed near Resolute Bay and the Canadian Forces, working with civilian authorities and other partners, were able to rescue the three survivors and quickly get them to the hospital.

Initiatives like Operation Nanook allow lead departments and the Canadian Forces to combine traditional indigenous knowledge and know-how on the ground with more modern capabilities like aerial patrols conducted by the Royal Canadian Air Force, maritime patrols in partnership with the Canadian Coast Guard and even space-based satellite systems to provide detailed surveillance and monitoring of the north on behalf of the Government of Canada.

Our government recognizes what advanced equipment and facilities can make possible in the north. That is why it is carrying through on measures to increase the Canadian Forces' capabilities and infrastructure in the region.

Six to eight Arctic offshore patrol ships, the first of which we can expect to take to water later in this decade, will provide an important presence in the area as ice-bound passages become navigable. We are also continuing the development of a berthing and refuelling facility in Nanisivik and of an Arctic training centre in Resolute, which will reinforce our presence in the area and, just as important, serve as a place where our men and women in uniform can learn to operate effectively in the north, availing themselves of both the wisdom of the Rangers and of modern technology and approaches.

The Arctic lies at the heart of our identity as Canadians. For decades, its remoteness and severe weather kept it immune from much of the change and many of the dangers affecting the rest of Canada and the world. An increased interest in the Canadian Arctic has brought with it real challenges to this precious part of our country and its inhabitants. The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces play an important and even vital role in Canada's Arctic. Canada's armed forces have developed knowledge, partnerships and capabilities that make it especially suited for work in Canada's north. This government is committed to building on these so the Canadian Forces continues to be a valuable contributor to our Arctic security.

I have a question for the associate minister. Our Conservative government made a commitment to rebuild the fleets of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard and, as a result, launched the national ship procurement strategy for which our government was widely commended. While much of the focus has been on the shipbuilding contract award process, what has not been as clear is the impact this will have on the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Forces as a whole. Could the associate minister explain the benefits that this will have for our Canadian Forces?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I want to also clear up my comments earlier with regard to the Canadian Surface Combatant. This is in definition phase, planned for summer 2012.

In any event, the government is establishing strategic relationships with Vancouver Shipyards and Irving Shipbuilding, the two Canadian shipyards selected for the construction of large ships, both combat and non-combat. Our government has taken a leadership role in bringing the boom-bust cycle to an end in our national shipbuilding industry. The strategy will create considerable opportunity for Canada's marine industry in all regions by contributing to the building of large ships, competing to build smaller ships and conducting life extension, refit and repair work. Industry analysts have estimated that the government shipbuilding projects would contribute directly and indirectly to some 15,000 Canadian jobs and over \$2 billion in annual economic benefit for the next 30 years.

For the first time, our shipbuilding industry will have stable, secure work that will allow it to invest in the latest technology, develop highly skilled workforces and regain Canada's shipbuilding reputation. Our ships will be made in Canada by Canadians.

The previous government sat by watching our domestic shipbuilding capacity crumble as more and more Canadians lost their jobs. This government, our government, has taken a proactive role to ensure we have jobs, industrial capacity and an economically viable model. In a process that even the opposition parties have applauded, we have achieved two important goals. We have ensured the future strength of Canada's shipbuilding industry and we have maintained our domestic capacity to equip our Royal Canadian Navy, Coast Guard, research and science vessels. I believe Canadians would well be proud of the work that we are doing.

• (2320)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, this question is for the Minister of National Defence.

The brave men and women of the Canadian Forces have demonstrated leadership on a global scale and have taken on a leadership role in a multitude of missions across the world.

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Maritime security offers another opportunity for Canada to continue to play a leadership role with our allies. Maritime security is an ongoing concern for not only Canada, but many of our major allies and partners.

Is the Minister of National Defence able to inform the committee of the whole of Canada's contributions to address global maritime security concerns?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, like the member for Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, I come from a coastal community and maritime security is now an enormous role within the Canadian Forces. It is an enormous role within Norad, with maritime approaches now falling under that command.

With respect to what Canada is doing, as was mentioned earlier by the parliamentary secretary, currently we have 1,300 Canadian soldiers deployed on 15 international missions. Global security includes the deployment of naval assets. With respect to ongoing missions, we have sailors aboard the HMCS *Charlottetown* making contributions to maritime security through Operation Active Endeavour, which is NATO's mission to prevent the movement of terrorism and weapons at sea, which is an ongoing mission within the Mediterranean.

The Canadian Forces are also part of successful operations such as Operation Jaguar, which completed its mandate in November of this past year with respect to counter-narcotics missions. Operation Jaguar began with a request from the government of Jamaica to deploy assets, both aviation and naval assets, in assisting in the mandate to conduct essential training and search and rescue operations, which we were speaking of a moment ago.

Also, we have had the privilege of announcing the participation of HMCS *St. John's* and its ship borne CH-124A Sea King helicopter in Operation Caribbe.

We have seen the Canadian Forces contribute as well to Op Martillo, a binational joint inter-agency and multinational collaboration effort with the western hemisphere.

We also know that future training operations will include our Canadian submarines, including those taking place in the Pacific. Throughout the course of these activities we are extremely proud of our sailors and all they provide with our naval and aviation assets and also working with other agencies including the Coast Guard. This is important work given the size of our coastline, the largest coastline of any on the planet. As well, this is why the associate minister has referred to the historic naval bill that will see the replacement of all of our fleet of combat vessels, in addition to icebreakers and Arctic patrol vessels.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, when I was with the general on the HMCS *Vancouver*, I saw him gather the sailors around and say to them, "It's who ought to ask for help". At the highest level, the general has made it clear that the mental health of the soldiers, sailors and aircrew is of the utmost importance.

Could the Minister of National Defence expand once again on the investments we have made in the area of mental health?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I too have had the great pleasure to stand in admiration to see our Chief of the Defence Staff, Canada's top soldier, address those brave men and women and speak to them

personally and passionately about the importance of coming forward, of self-diagnosing, of recognizing that there is a need to get help but, most important, that the help is there and to do away with any stigma or any negative connotation that it is somehow unlike a soldier to ask for help.

Soldiers are the toughest, most diligent, most patriotic and passionate Canadians, but there are times in their life where they do need the help and need to reach out. That is why we continue to make these important investments to provide not only the physical surroundings, but the individuals, the personal support, the chaplains, the psychiatrists, the mental health professionals. We will continue to make those important investments in that most important asset, and that is our personnel and the help they need.

● (2325)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, I have a question for the Minister of National Defence.

In 2008, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that the mission in Afghanistan would cost roughly \$18.5 billion by 2011. I would like to know what the government's estimate is of the total cost of the mission to date.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the mission itself has changed in terms of its role. We have gone from a combat mission in Kandahar province in the south of the country now to a training mission in and around Kabul.

With respect to the ongoing costs, the funding arrangement that we have in place allows for full incremental costs for the mission to date, totalling \$8.7 billion. This figure includes the redeployment and the reconstitution of the mission itself and will run to the period of 2014, which is the current commitment.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, on another note, according to a Postmedia News report today, the government is delaying its procurement of the Arctic patrol ships that were to be delivered in 2015. Can the minister tell us when he plans to take delivery of these ships?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the actual fact is the pre-emptive work being done to ensure the production is a smooth production is ongoing. This will ensure that come the actual completion of the project, we will in essence have achieved some significant benefits with the upfront work being done in co-operation with the shipbuilder.

These offshore patrol ships are a key part of the national shipbuilding procurement strategy. The project timelines were not updated because the project did not have the opportunity to engage with shipyards and verify the predictable timelines with the national shipbuilding strategy that was not in place at that time.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, I would also like to have some specifics about the Nanisivik base. Can the minister tell us when he expects to start construction of the facility and whether it will be a fully-equipped deepwater port, as the government had promised?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, a commitment has been made by this government to put in place in the Arctic refuelling capabilities. The location chosen was Nanisivik. There has been a scaling of that project with respect to the initial announcement.

We have conducted a full-value engineering review of the project to ensure it will deliver what we require in that location within the mandated budget. Progress has been made on the project itself within the definition phase now and the interim facilities were built during the summer of 2010, including a temporary office building. Temporary deployments and operations and future military exercises will benefit from this refuelling station. The construction of these interim facilities will also provide training opportunities in the Arctic, which is an important priority of this government.

Clearly, the future arrival of Royal Canadian Navy offshore patrol ships, the eventual completion of the project of a new icebreaker and all of the navy assets that will be able to refuel will benefit from this project. This is part of a larger footprint that we see of facilities and infrastructure in the Canadian north.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, I would like to go back to my previous question and have the minister provide clear and specific answers.

I would like to know when he plans to start construction of the base and whether, yes or no, it will be a fully-equipped deepwater port facility, as promised.

• (2330)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, it is a deepwater port, so it will indeed be a deepwater refuelling station.

The intention is to have the capacity to refuel at that location. It is a port that was previously used for commercial purposes as well. Therefore, there is remediation work being done on site.

The largest of all the challenges is to have the tanks, and that is the actual repositories of the fuel in place. That would require a great deal of engineering and of exercise and investment. Yes, the project is moving forward and the intention is to have that refuelling capability.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, the minister has announced the closure of 10 recruitment centres across Canada. I would like to know if he has decided which centres will be closed and, if he has, can he give us the list of the centres and towns affected?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I am glad to report to the hon. member and to this House that we have exceeded our recruiting numbers consistently over the past number of years. There is a

tremendous interest in the general population to work for the Canadian Forces, to be in uniform, as the member herself has done in her lifetime.

Budget 2012 spells out what we will do in terms of maintaining our Canadian Forces strength at 68,000 within our regular force and 27,000 for our reserve force strength.

With respect to the sites for recruiting that we will be closing as a result of a slow-down in terms of intake and recruiting requirements, they include centres in Sault Ste. Marie, Yellowknife, Rouyn-Noranda, Thunder Bay, Saskatoon, Bathurst, North Bay, Windsor, Mississauga, Kitchener, Saint John and Three Rivers.

I stress that this will not significantly impact the overall recruiting. We have, called upon new technology, using the Internet as part of our recruiting drive. We are also using recruiting officers and recruiting vehicles that move throughout the country. This is another method that has been very successful. These mobile recruiting stations have received a tremendous response from the Canadian population.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, with regard to Canadian Forces recruitment, I would like to know what impact these closures will have, especially the closure of sites in remote areas, and how this will affect other movements that use the services of these recruitment centres, such as officers serving with cadets. Is it possible that this will affect officer cadets who wish to serve, and that reserve regiments served by these recruitment centres will be affected?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned, we have been extremely successful in our recruiting over the last number of years.

Now, with the slowing of the operational tempo, the close out of the combat mission, it will not impact, as I said, significantly in any way. In fact, the Internet has really become the go-to option when it comes to the civilian population searching for information about recruiting and about how one becomes a member of the Canadian Forces.

With respect to the Canadian Forces being an employer of choice, we have reached those expansion targets way ahead of schedule. We have the highest retention rate that we have seen in years. This again impacts on our need to intake new members into the Canadian Forces.

I mentioned the reserve strength and the regular force strength staying stable now at 68,000 regular forces and 27,000 reserve force. On recruiting, just by point of reference, we saw 4,000 regular force personnel enter the Canadian Forces in the year 2011-12. The regular force recruiting targets planned for next year will go up by about 400.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, does the minister sincerely believe that the Internet is just as effective at persuading young people to join the Canadian Forces as talking face to face with an experienced soldier in uniform who can speak passionately about the job?

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I personally always prefer to talk to people face to face but I can tell the hon. member that the initial contacts over the Internet are an extremely effective tool. Then, of course, this begins a process that eventually leads, as she knows, having served, to an interview process, and a process that involves sitting face to face with recruiting officers.

Just to come back to the overall subject of retention, we carefully track this issue to ensure that we are in the range of the right numbers of attrition and retention. We are conducting, at different points in time, discussions with currently serving members, members who might want to transfer from regular force service to reserve service or vice versa. We have made this option much easier and the transition from regular force to reserve force and back has become a very attractive option to members of the Canadian Forces.

I would also say to those who have suffered injury and those who have undertaken treatment that we and the compassionate work and leadership of the Canadian Forces Chief of Defence Staff have made it much easier and much more of an option for members to stay in service, where otherwise, as in the past, they might have been required to retire.

• (2335)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, were any studies carried out before the centres were closed? Were alternatives to closing the recruitment centres proposed, such as relocating recruitment centre activities to buildings occupied by reserve regiments instead of completely eliminating the service from certain regions?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the way in which we arrive at these decisions is never easy. It is not our preference ever to close recruiting centres, but as I mentioned, new technology was a factor. We look at the numbers that are walking into particular recruiting stations, and statistics are examined in terms of the annual use of a particular outlet or station. We then make decisions regionally based on the numbers and the need. As I said, our retention has had an impact on these decisions.

Most importantly, we have grown the size of the Canadian Forces. Reference points can be drawn from the Canada first defence strategy. We still have aspirations to get to 100,000 over the course of the Canada first defence strategy, but we are way ahead of schedule.

Those currently in uniform know it is an extremely exciting and rewarding career. We had great advertising, which also factored into Canadians' knowledge of the exciting career opportunities in the Canadian Forces.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, did the minister take language factors into account before making these cuts? Did he determine whether there would be specific impacts on the recruitment of francophones outside the region? Did he take care not to do away with any recruitment centres in regions where there are more francophones?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the hon. member knows full well that most of the recruitment centre closures were not carried out in the regions of Quebec.

[English]

Clearly, there were regional needs that we factored into the decision.

We look regularly across the Canadian Forces as to what the needs might be and what trades and particular skills sets are required. Right now there is a great shortage of individuals with skilled trades for the ships that we are going to be building in the future. We target certain professions within the rank and file. This is one of the factors.

Language requirements are very much a priority for the Canadian Forces, as the member knows. We have had tremendous participation from the province of Quebec and francophone Canadians in our Canadian Forces. We are very proud of their contribution.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Chair, during the first wave of cuts in April, the Department of National Defence cut nearly 400 civilian jobs on the Quebec military bases. Quebec was the province most affected by the Department of National Defence cuts. Why?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I disagree with the member's assessment. These cost savings are in reaction to the obvious need, to slow growth in some areas and to make investments in the areas where we need to address certain pressure points.

When it comes to the province of Quebec, we are extremely proud of Bagotville and Valcartier, and our serving men and women who have played a tremendous role in the extraordinary expansion of the Canadian Forces that we have seen in the last number of years.

As witness to that, I would point the hon. member to the incredible response in her province to support the men and women in uniform by the wearing of yellow ribbons, the red Friday rallies and the appreciation shown at sports events.

• (2340)

[Translation]

Quebec takes a great deal of pride in our Canadian Forces' performance and contributions, as do all the provinces. I am also very proud of the contributions made by all Canadian Forces members in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Chair, I think I'll preclude a statement and go right to a couple of questions for the Minister of National Defence.

The first question has to do with the Canada first defence strategy.

Business of Supply

There are six core missions for the Canadian Forces, which include conducting daily domestic and continental operations, as well as in the Arctic through Norad and supporting civilian authorities. I wonder if the minister could expand on examples of the Canadian Forces' delivery of excellence at home.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Northumberland—Quinte West for his outstanding support of the Canadian Forces. I know his riding is home to CFB Trenton and he is in regular attendance at that base and interacts regularly with members of the forces. He himself served in uniform as a member of the police force in the province of Ontario, so he has a great affinity for service.

What we hope to see in delivering the Canada first defence strategy and updating and keeping ever fresh that document is the further delivery of providing to Canadians the type of security around our territory, our maritime approaches.

Maintaining our search and rescue capabilities remains an important role for our forces, and that includes being able to respond to Canadians and visitors in distress 24/7, also assisting civilian authorities, police officers, like the hon. member in his previous life, in the important work that they do responding to disasters or any attacks that we might experience on Canadian soil.

Those are just some of the many roles performed by members of the Canadian Forces daily.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Chair, perhaps the minister could talk about how improvements, such as the \$4 million announcement he made at CFB Borden and improvements at CFB Trenton, will improve the lives of our men and women in uniform and their families, and what they do with regard to safety and success.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I will respond directly to the question about the member's base at CFB Trenton.

What we have seen recently is contract awards totalling \$52 million for two infrastructure projects at 8 Wing Canadian Forces Base Trenton, a place near and dear to the member's heart.

These types of investments, whether it be in infrastructure, programs or in equipment, give great solace to Canadian Forces members and their families because it says one simple thing, which is that the government cares, the country cares and we are supporting them with the necessary tools to do this important and sometimes dangerous work. That impacts tremendously on their morale. It impacts, of course, on their performance and it impacts on their continued desire to serve.

It is fair to say that members present here and Canadians who may be tuned in have seen a huge growth, not only in the capabilities provided by members of the Canadian Forces but understanding, appreciation and love for what the Canadian Forces do for them.

The patriotism, the performance of these men and women is outstanding, and we thank them each and every day. Canadians should never miss an opportunity to reach out to the Canadian Forces and to say, "Thank you".

The Deputy Chair: It being 11:43 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) all votes are deemed reported. The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

• (2345)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:45 p.m.)

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