



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 047 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 12, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 12, 2014

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 Pickering—Scarborough East.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget was an insult to Quebec. Gone is open federalism. Instead, Ottawa has opted for predatory federalism and delivered a direct blow to Quebec.

Despite the unanimous refusal by Quebec's economic players to allow a made-in-Ottawa job training program to be shoved down their throats, the federal government keeps pushing and has signed off on it. It has even gone as far as threatening to implement its reform as of April 1, whether or not a deal is reached.

This morning, saying that he will do what he likes, when he likes, the Minister of Finance proved just how harmful Ottawa's attitude is to Quebec.

The fact that the government was able to find \$250 million per year for the automotive industry in Ontario, while leaving nothing but crumbs for Quebec's forestry industry, makes the Quebec Conservative ministers' accusations that Quebec is not supportive enough of its economic growth all the more shameful.

The federal government is the one that does not care about the Quebec economy and wants to pick a fight.

[*English*]

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is in everyone's interest to help ensure that first nations youth receive the education, support, and job skills training they need to get good-paying, long-lasting jobs. The New Prosperity mine will provide just that support and training. Skills training is desperately needed to provide good jobs for our first nations youth.

I asked the leadership of the Tsilhqot'in nation to recognize that its young people need this training to get those jobs. I asked the leadership to visualize how its communities could benefit, if good-paying, long-lasting jobs could be filled by its young people. I urged the leadership to take advantage of this once in a generation opportunity that will provide jobs for their citizens that will last for more than 25 years.

The New Prosperity mine wants first nations youth to take advantage of its skills training to fill those good-paying mine jobs. This is an opportunity that must not be missed.

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[*Translation*]

CITY OF LAVAL

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this month, Laval was proud to be recognized as a senior-friendly municipality.

This recognition was the result of a long process that began in April 2010 and the combined efforts of many organizations in our wonderful region, including the Table régionale de concertation des aînés de Laval, the Laval volunteer centre and food bank, and the Laval committee on abuse and violence against seniors.

Laval now has a specific action plan that details the needs expressed by seniors and promotes social inclusion. These measures relate to public transit, community support, health services and more.

The NDP believes that seniors' quality of life is a priority. That is why we have proposed specific measures, such as a plan to improve the CPP and the QPP and lowering the age of eligibility for old age security to 65. All seniors are entitled to spend their retirement years in dignity.

Congratulations and thanks to all of the people who have made Laval into a senior-friendly municipality.

Statements by Members

[English]

THE BUDGET

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2014 demonstrates our government's commitment to fiscal responsibility and prosperity. It is our launch pad to success, reducing the budget deficit to \$2.9 billion and forecasting a \$6.4-billion surplus for next year, all without raising taxes or slashing transfers.

The economic action plan includes billions for B.C. for health care and social programs. It would close tax loopholes, control the size and cost of government, invest in skills training, cut red tape for small business, strengthen Canada's food safety system, and launch the Canada job grant.

Our government has piloted Canada through economic troubles and chartered a course for greater prosperity, stability, and growth. Thanks to Canada's economic action plan, Canada is one of the best places in the world to live and do business.

Budget 2014 is good for Fleetwood—Port Kells, good for B.C., and good for Canada.

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CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Central African Republic is in free fall, and we must act now, together and decisively.

The United Nations ranks it among the top three humanitarian emergencies and warned of the following:

It has all the elements that we have seen elsewhere, in places like Rwanda and Bosnia. The elements are there, the seeds are there, for a genocide.

Approximately 4.5 million people have been affected, half of them children, and 838,000 have been displaced. Attacks against children have sunk to atrocious, indefensible levels. Such attacks violate international humanitarian and human rights laws, and they must stop immediately.

Concrete action is urgently needed to prevent further violence. A recent UN appeal received only 11% of a \$551-million target.

What we do now, or fail to do, will have an impact on society for years to come, and we will be judged on how we choose to act.

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• (1410)

YOUTH FORUM

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in January I hosted a round table discussion in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie with the community's youth. The attendees provided their perspective on several pieces of current and pending legislation, including my own private member's motion.

All participants supported the government's pending bill on cybercrime, as well as Senate reform as opposed to Senate abolishment. The overwhelming majority do not support the third party's intent to legalize marijuana. However, all of them supported

my pending private member's motion on domestic violence prevention.

Jobs were also discussed. I am proud to say that since 2006, the Conservative government has helped more than half a million young Canadians develop the skills they need to help them succeed in the job market. Economic action plan 2014, announced yesterday, builds upon this record by providing \$55 million toward paid internships, as well as \$100 million for interest-free student loans for apprentices.

This government recognizes that youth are our future, as do I, and I look forward to hosting more youth forums in my riding.

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CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the cost of living in rural and northern communities is much higher than in urban communities. For many, the cost of keeping their homes warm has reached a tipping point.

As Teresa from Atikokan wrote to me recently:

The propane truck just drove away after filling our tank. It was the first time we've filled it since last May. You can imagine my shock when we discovered the price had risen 80% since our last fill up.

That is right, the cost of heating her home has risen 80% in less than a year.

There are many stories like Teresa's. Brian in Nolalu, Kathy in South Gillies, and many others living in Thunder Bay—Rainy River, are hurting.

The Canadian Propane Association insists that there is no shortage in Canada.

Well, if there is no shortage as the industry claims, then it must be yet another case of price gouging by an industry that targets a captive consumer during a time of need.

The Minister of Finance will not notice the price spike until he goes to fill up his barbecue tank at his cottage this summer, but the Canadians he serves are suffering today and deserve action.

If the Conservative government turns its back on rural Canadians on this issue, as they have on so many other issues, then Canadians should know that the NDP is ready to get to work and make life more affordable for them, beginning in 2015.

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KILLARNEY SENIORS CENTRE

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over 15 years, southeast Vancouver's 25,000 seniors have identified the need for a local seniors centre to improve their quality of life and provide an accessible space for wellness, recreation, and socialization.

Previous Liberal governments did not get it done.

Statements by Members

Last month, our government delivered. I was honoured to announce a \$2.5-million federal contribution to finally build the Killarney seniors centre. In partnership with the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia, this 15-year dream is now a reality.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the thousands of constituents who worked so tirelessly to make their voices heard. I especially acknowledge the leadership of Lorna Gibbs, Mohinder Sidhu, Shin Wan Hon, and Keith Jacobson for their tremendous efforts over so many years.

This is yet another example of how our government is delivering for Canada's seniors. We have enacted stronger measures to combat the abuse of seniors. We have provided seniors in need with the largest GIS increase in 25 years, and we have reduced senior's annual taxes by—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

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KINGSWAY LEGION NO. 175

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for almost 10 years, a small band of dedicated Edmontonians from Kingsway Legion No. 175 have faithfully trekked to the Edmonton International Airport at all hours of the day or night, and in any weather, to say farewell or to welcome back our troops from their tours of duty in Afghanistan. Many of them wear Legion dress and medals. They are supported by others who value and salute the service and sacrifice of Canadians in uniform. They offer Tim Hortons coffee, donuts, cell phones, and unbridled thanks and admiration for folks who put it on the line.

I have been privileged to join them on many occasions and can attest to the gratitude of the troops for the reception they receive, for the occasional escort home by CF-18 fighters, for the police escort through the city to their garrison, for the fire trucks with lights flashing, and for other first responders and citizens who line the streets to say thank you.

I have never seen a city embrace the military like Edmonton does. Thankfully, the duty of providing this 24/7 welcoming committee is coming to an end.

I want to thank and salute Vicky, Mac, Wayne, Betty, Jim, Kate, and many others, for their service in days gone by, and for their dedication to honouring those who serve today.

You may now stand easy.

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[*Translation*]

WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House today to warmly congratulate speed skater Charles Hamelin, who on Monday won a gold medal at the Sochi Olympics in short track speed skating. On behalf of everyone in Verchères—Les Patriotes, way to go Charles.

Nicknamed “the locomotive of Sainte-Julie”, Mr. Hamelin enjoyed a nearly perfect season on the World Cup circuit. We wish

him the best of luck in his three remaining events, which will give him the opportunity to add to his already impressive record.

I would also like to wish the best of luck to his brother, François Hamelin, as well as Charles Cournoyer. Everyone in my riding sends you their support and is very proud of all of you.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage all our Canadian athletes in Sochi and congratulate them on the remarkable number of medals they have already won, and the ones still to come.

Furthermore, I would like to recognize the 30th anniversary of Maison des jeunes de Varennes. For the past three decades, this organization has been providing our young people with a friendly place where they can develop their talents and express their creativity. Thank you for your exceptional work and your remarkable commitment.

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●(1415)

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday I joined the Prime Minister, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo in Alberta for the announcement of a historic agreement and a financial commitment of over \$1.9 billion to reform the first nations education system and at long last give first nations control of first nations education.

New legislation will provide first nations students on reserve with previously unavailable supports, minimum standards, and opportunities for a high-quality education. It will introduce statutory funding that will allow for first nations to provide vital language and cultural programs unique to their communities while operating in a responsible and accountable manner.

Our Conservative government has engaged in extensive consultation with first nations leaders, parents, and educators, and we will continue to work tirelessly toward ensuring that first nations children have access to a quality education and full participation in the Canadian economy.

As the Prime Minister noted, this agreement is “good for First Nations, it is good for Canadians, and it is good for our country’s future”.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 1999, the government has been committed to doing full, gender-based analysis of its budgets. We have yet to see this work done by either Liberal or Conservative governments. Now another budget is before us that does almost nothing for women.

Statements by Members

Women make up over half the workforce in this country, yet the cards are stacked dangerously against them. There is not a drop of money in the budget for child care. There is no money for improvements to parental leave. There is no money for housing security for women who badly need it. There is no money for a national action plan to end violence against women, even though the throne speech promised action on this front. There is also no money for a national inquiry into the deaths and disappearance of over 600 indigenous women, whose families are still waiting for justice.

The budget fails the women of this country. Canadian women work hard, bear the burden of discrimination, and deserve much better than this budget.

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ADOPTION

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was proud last year when our government expanded the adoption expense tax credit, which recognizes some additional costs borne by adoptive parents.

It is estimated that 2,000 children are adopted from within Canada every year, yet, 30,000 children who are in the care of child welfare agencies across the country are also waiting to be adopted. This means we need to do more, and that is exactly what we are doing through economic action plan 2014.

Currently, eligible adoption expenses related to the completed adoption of a child under the age of 18 may be claimed up to a maximum of \$11,774. Economic action plan 2014 proposes to increase the maximum amount of eligible expenses to \$15,000. This is fantastic news for prospective Canadian families who are looking to give a deserving child a loving home.

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EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today in light of the decision to idle all operations at the Cliffs Wabush mine in Labrador, a mine that has operated since 1965. The decision will put over 400 hard-working Canadians out of work and will provide a major challenge for a community that is so reliant on the success of this particular mine.

Let me say to all those affected that my colleagues and I will continue to work hard to do what we can to mitigate the impact of this decision on them, their families, and their community.

I also call upon the federal government to assist these highly skilled mining workers to integrate into new jobs and help transition and grow the local economy to create new opportunities in western Labrador.

Now is the time for all of us, including the Government of Canada, to invest in skilled economies like that in Wabush and Labrador City. The people are waiting and they would welcome such action.

● (1420)

THE BUDGET

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like all members of the House, I looked forward with great anticipation to the good news that our Minister of Finance would deliver in budget 2014, and I was not disappointed.

Not only would economic action plan 2014 continue to create jobs and opportunities, it also commits to cutting red tape for an industry that is near and dear to my heart, that of craft beer.

Whether it is made using blueberries, strawberries, or pumpkin, I think all members would agree that the choice is clear: we best not interfere with Canada's craft beer.

Representing over \$14 billion of economic activity, hard-working microbreweries like Forked River Brewing Company in London, Ontario, and those across Canada, work hard to produce quality products. I am proud to stand with a government that is delivering for these talented entrepreneurs.

I encourage my friends opposite not to waste their votes along partisan lines but to vote in support of good taste.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have finally kept a budget promise. They promised they would do nothing, and their budget delivered nothing. For people facing record household debt, there was nothing to make life more affordable; for veterans, nothing to keep support offices open; for young people, nothing to deal with the youth unemployment crisis.

We were happy to see they finally agreed to act on pay-to-pay fees. This was long overdue. However, the budget only talks about banks. What about other companies, like telecom companies that are already forcing seniors and others to pay to get their bills in the mail?

Yesterday's budget was about an election in 2015, not what Canadians need today.

The NDP knows it can do better. New Democrats know that Canadians work hard and they deserve a fair deal, a fair break. Canadians know they can trust the NDP to fight for middle-class families, to fight for young people, to fight for veterans, to fight for seniors and for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, economic action plan 2014 was announced and demonstrates our government's commitment to growing the economy and creating jobs, opportunity, and prosperity for all Canadians.

Oral Questions

Following the Minister of Finance's announcement, the Liberal leader had some very interesting and telling exchanges. During an interview, the Liberal leader refused to answer a question on whether he would run deficits or not. I am not making this up. His answer was: "The commitment needs to be a commitment to grow the economy and the budget will balance itself".

I am sorry, but any good economist knows that a budget does not just "balance itself".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask hon. members to wait until the member for Peace River has finished his statement. Then they can feel free to applaud.

The hon. member for Peace River still has the floor.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members know that this is obviously a faulty assessment, and Canadians would agree and expect more from a G7 leader.

What we all know, what we are all convinced of, and what we would ask the Liberal leader is, why will he not just admit that he is in over his head?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there were some interesting criticisms this morning from the finance minister about the Prime Minister's plan for income splitting. Does the Prime Minister agree with his finance minister that the Conservative plan is of no help to the vast majority of Canadian families?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the finance minister and this is the government, against the wishes of opposition members, which brought in income splitting for our senior citizens, something from which they benefit every day and every year.

This government, in the last election, made a commitment that when we balance the budget—the budget is not yet balanced—one of the highest priorities of this government will be tax reduction for Canadian families. I know that their plans would be tax hikes on Canadian families, but we in this party believe we should cut taxes for Canadian families.

* * *

• (1425)

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to be fair, there is good news in the budget with regard to food safety, including the hiring of 200 new food inspectors. Because it is such a good idea, and we agree on that, can the Prime Minister just answer one simple question: Why is it that he fired 300 food inspectors over the last two years?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Of course, Mr. Speaker, that is not true. This government has been increasing the number of front-line inspectors and will continue to do so.

That is one of the many reasons why the budget was so well received. I would note a number of organizations have spoken very positively about the budget: the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Royal Canadian Legion, Special Olympics Canada, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors, the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association, the Assembly of First Nations, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Alzheimer Society of Canada. I could go on and on.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Temerity is one thing, Mr. Speaker, but those numbers are easily verifiable. The Conservatives did fire 300 food inspectors and they compromised the public when they did it.

[Translation]

Under the Conservatives' electoral "deform" bill, investigators will report to the Minister of Justice from now on.

Why should Canadians trust a system in which the people who investigate Conservative election fraud are under the orders of a Conservative minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our legislation ensures that the Commissioner of Canada Elections is fully independent, more independent than ever.

[English]

When the leader of the NDP is talking about issues of facts, let me draw some attention to his own facts. Yesterday, he got up and said it was absurd that we would not count fundraising spending as election expenses in the conduct of an election when, in the leadership race he won in the NDP, they did not count fundraising expenditures against their election cap.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives' rigged elections act, the Chief Electoral Officer would be banned from warning the public about election fraud and voter suppression, but the commissioner of elections would actually have to warn suspects under investigation. The public would not be warned, but the fraudsters would.

Why do Conservatives want election fraud suspects warned that they are being investigated? Is it because the Conservatives are the suspects? The good people of Peterborough want to know.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. All Canadians, including elections officials, have every responsibility to report any evidence of wrongdoing to Elections Canada and to the commissioner of elections. That is what we do on this side. Certainly, we want to make sure that, when there are incidents like the cheating the NDP did with the union donations, all of that information is made completely public, as it should have been.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from 1995 to 2006, the Liberals took \$57 billion from the employment insurance fund to pay for their tax breaks for large corporations.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance admitted that his balanced budget includes the employment insurance surplus. We would like the Prime Minister to tell us one thing.

Can he assure us that he will not do the same thing the Liberals did and use money from the EI fund for something else?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we discussed this matter with organizations like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

There was a deficit in the employment insurance fund during the recession. Now we are balancing that fund. Our system is based on the idea of keeping that fund balanced over the long term.

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●(1430)

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance admitted he had not heard the loud and repeated calls for help from our veterans.

He said that he had not "...been asked for money for post-traumatic stress disorder...".

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why did he not ask for more help for our veterans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government, even before the budget, has made record investments into precisely those kinds of health services for our veterans.

I was delighted to see the Legion support yesterday for the extension of the Last Post Fund.

It is passing strange that the leader of the Liberal Party would ask me about someone else's comments on the budget when yesterday he said that we should not be balancing the budget in this country because, according to him, "...the budget will balance itself".

I will let him explain that.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, economic growth in 2013 was down from the year before, which was down from the year before that, which was down from the year before that.

Yet we saw in the budget that this year's plan is the same as last year's, which was the same as the year before that, which was the same as the year before that.

When will the government offer a real plan for economic growth and prosperity for the middle class?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the record of the government's economic action plans is very clear.

This country, coming out of the recession, has the highest growth rate among major developed economies. It has the highest level of job creation. It is one of the few with a AAA credit rating. It has the strongest financial sector in the world. It has, by far, the lowest debt among the major developed economies.

That is our record, year after year after year. Crazy statements about "the budget will balance itself" come from the Liberal Party year after year after year.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, economic growth balances budgets, not the worst record on growth since R. B. Bennett.

[Translation]

Economic growth is what will help Canadians prosper, not a vote-seeking surplus swiped from the pockets of middle-class workers.

Can the Prime Minister explain why his budget does not include a plan to generate economic growth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party leader's economic analysis is off. That is not enough. If we want to keep taxes low, we need more than just economic growth. We also need to control the growth of spending.

[English]

That is exactly what we are doing on this side, controlling our expenses, making sure we are not raising taxes and making key investments while balancing the budget, not all by itself.

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[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier the Prime Minister tried to distance himself from a rather clear provision in his electoral "reform" bill. I want to give him the opportunity to state clearly what he thinks the legislation says.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his bill makes it impossible for the Chief Electoral Officer to warn the public about election fraud? Does he realize that, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this reform is to ensure that there is an independent commissioner of elections who can conduct investigations. It is essential that this office have all the necessary tools for dealing with electoral fraud.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is starting to pay attention, but clause 18 is quite clear.

Oral Questions

The only thing that the Chief Electoral Officer has the right to talk about with voters is where, when and how to vote and nothing else. The Chief Electoral Officer cannot report to Parliament, as his minister was saying, because, as we know, Parliament is dissolved during the election period. The bill is clear: it muzzles the Chief Electoral Officer.

Why does the Prime Minister want to prevent the Chief Electoral Officer from communicating with Canadians about other topics?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the main problem is that the NDP decided to oppose this bill before they even read it. The NDP critic even admitted it. The reality is that the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada has very important duties in the conduct of elections. According to his report, there is a lot of work to be done to improve the system and we encourage Elections Canada to do its job.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will always respond to that invitation positively.

Let us read the bill under subsection 376(3). "The commercial value of services provided to a registered party for the purpose of soliciting..." is not included in the total.

Hundreds of paid telemarketers, hundreds of thousands of phone calls in a federal general election, no problem. They are not in the campaign limit. How would Elections Canada even know if these calls were going out to prior Conservative Party donors? It is just not plausible.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this refers to people who have been long-time donors to a political party, which is a very small percentage of the electorate.

I point out the hypocrisy of the leader of the NDP. His own party, when it established internal spending limits on its campaign, made an exception for fundraising for its political candidates.

It is not reasonable. It is reasonable that those expenses would be paid entirely by the party, and unlike eligible expenses, would not be claimed for reimbursement, as the NDP would like to do.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is coming from someone who never revealed who donated to his leadership.

In just one of their scams, the in-and-out scandal, Conservatives spent more than a million bucks illegally. Their technique is quite simple: cheat, fight like hell when caught, and then when convicted, name them to the Senate.

Does he really think Irving Gerstein is a model?

The Speaker: That seemed to be more a question about party finances instead of government business.

I see the Prime Minister rising to answer. I will allow him to answer the question, but I would urge members to keep their questions on subjects under government responsibility.

The Rt. Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allegation about my own donors is completely false.

The point I would make is that these kinds of fraudulent allegations are exactly what we get when a party loses an election.

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EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, budgets are an opportunity to help make life a little more affordable, to give families a fair break, but yesterday's budget failed to deliver. Nearly 300,000 more people are unemployed today than before the recession, yet the government failed to deliver a plan to create jobs.

While so many Canadians are struggling, Conservatives are playing politics. Will the minister now table a real plan to create jobs, or is he really going to make people wait for help until it is an election year?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister tabled an excellent plan and has the record to prove it. That is the best job creation record in the G7.

What are the proposals of the NDP? That we should shut down our resource industries, because they are a disease; that we should block all trade agreements, because they are against trade; that we should bring in a carbon tax and raise taxes on Canadian consumers and businesses.

The reason Canada has such an outstanding job creation and growth record compared to most other developed economies is precisely because we do the opposite of what the NDP proposes.

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THE BUDGET

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not going to play politics while millions of Canadians are waiting for help. It is just wrong.

Canadian cities are facing infrastructure crises. Provinces are trying to meet demands for everything from transit to housing to job training. Canadians are struggling to make ends meet.

Why are Conservatives putting Conservative squabbles with the provinces ahead of taking action to help Canadians?

• (1440)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she talked about playing politics. Last year we brought in, yet again, a new record amount of money for municipal infrastructure investment, with the strong endorsement last year, and again this year, of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Oral Questions

In this budget we want to talk about job creation and hope for young people, and record investments in first nations education, strongly supported by the Assembly of First Nations. So if the member and her party do not want to play politics, they will vote for these good measures.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a number of issues have fallen by the wayside in this empty budget. What has not fallen by the wayside is the good old Conservative approach of confronting the provinces instead of working with them.

Now, the Minister of Finance, who no longer knows whether his government is for or against income splitting, has decided to repeat his ill-advised ultimatum about the Canada job grant. That drew some harsh criticism from many provinces.

Why are the Conservatives getting caught up in pointless bickering that could so easily be avoided?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is focusing on job creation instead of bickering, and our record proves it.

The Canada job grant will help us reach our main objective, which is creating jobs in Canada. We are always prepared to work with the provinces that have the same objective.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the Conservatives' inconsistency. The government keeps bragging about supporting our soldiers and taking military procurement seriously. However, its new budget cuts \$3.1 billion from the defence procurement budget over the next four years. This money had been earmarked for new ships, vehicles and helicopters.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell us what purchases will be delayed or cancelled? Will it be ships, search and rescue planes, helicopters or trucks?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a rather curious question coming from a party that has opposed every military purchase made by this government and requested by our soldiers.

The government adjusted DND's budget at its request, so that the money will be available when our military personnel need it. There are no cuts. Unfortunately for the NDP, we are committed to moving forward with military procurement.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first the Minister of National Defence had \$3.1 billion taken away from him. Now he is not even allowed to speak for himself.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for St. John's East has the floor, and I would like to hear the question.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the trucks were supposed to be ready years ago. Construction on the joint supply ships was

supposed to have started already, like in 2008. Fixed-wing search and rescue planes were promised in 2006 and again for 2015.

Would the Prime Minister confirm then if he is going to answer which projects will be delayed or cancelled because of this budget?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year there are profiles of capital expenditures based on what the Department of National Defence asks for in terms of its own spending plans. There has been absolutely no reduction. On the contrary.

We know that the NDP has opposed every single major capital investment we have made in the military. I can assure the hon. member of the NDP, to his great disappointment, that all that money is still there, and all those future capital investments are going to happen.

Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget turned a blind eye to our economy's biggest problem, stagnant growth. The finance minister himself admitted that our economy will miss the target he set in his own fall forecast.

Contrary to what we have just heard from the Prime Minister, the experts agree. The IMF says we will lag both the U.S. and the U.K. in growth this year. The OECD predicts we will fall behind its average for growth in 2015, ranking just 16th out of 30. Why did the government give middle-class Canadians a do-nothing budget?

• (1445)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear that the Liberal Party's definition of "do nothing" is when we are not raising taxes and not spending money we cannot afford.

We know the record. The IMF is very clear. The government's policy approach has been completely appropriate. The IMF and others recognize that Canada has had the strongest economic growth coming out of the recession, over many years. All the tables are there for the member to review.

The fact that we are seeing some pickup and growth in the United States and other economies is positive for Canadian exports, and we look forward to that.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance was part of an Ontario government that created a pre-election, phoney, fiscally unsustainable surplus. Instead, Ontarians were left with a \$6 billion deficit and a botched Highway 407 asset sale.

Now the minister is trying to fool Canadians again with another pre-election, fiscally unsustainable surplus, again based on one-time asset sales.

Is the minister hoping Canadians forget his Ontario record of budget deception and asset sale incompetence?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a rather bizarre question. The member is suggesting that not only should we not balance the budget but that we will never balance the budget, when his own leader says it will balance magically on its own.

Oral Questions

This government made a firm commitment to Canadians in the last election. With modest economic growth and controlled spending, we would ensure, without tax hikes on individual families and businesses, that we would balance the budget by the next election. I can say we are certainly on track to do that as Canadians.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is rich from a Prime Minister who has added over \$160 billion to the national debt.

When provincial governments propose higher CPP premiums to improve Canadian pension income, the Minister of Finance calls it a job-killing payroll tax, but when the minister uses high EI premiums to pad his books to create a phoney pre-election surplus, it is fair game.

Why does the minister think that higher payroll taxes are okay when they help Conservative politics but not okay when they help Canadian pensioners?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance account ran a deficit during the recession. It will run a balance over time, and that is how it is set up. Certainly we are opposed to the 35% EI hike that would be required to institute the Liberals 45-day work year.

On debt, let me just comment on the facts of debt. The fact of the matter is that the federal debt burden in Canada is the lowest in the G7, by far. In fact, it is about half of what it is in any other country, including Germany. In reality, our debt burden will actually be lower than it was before the recession in the next couple of years.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year's budget unilaterally cut provincial skills training, but the government finally promised to sit down and negotiate these changes.

Yesterday, Conservatives were back to making threats. They will unilaterally kill provincial job-training programs unless provinces agree to the government's demands.

Too many Canadians are out of work. They want the federal government to work with provinces and with municipalities. Why does the minister prefer threats to collaboration?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I unsurprisingly reject the premise of the question.

The reality is that this government is making record investments in skills development to create jobs, including the labour market agreement of which the member speaks, which was introduced by this government, \$500 million in transfers to provinces.

We just want to make sure that we are getting maximum bang for the taxpayers' buck out of those dollars so that they actually lead to real jobs.

We do not want résumé factories. We do not want training for the sake of it. We want employers, actually putting money into training so that they guarantee people jobs at the end of it. Why is the NDP against job training that leads to real jobs?

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the week, the Minister of Employment and Social Development said that he was having productive discussions with the provinces. His colleague, the Minister of Finance, contradicted him this morning. The provinces will no longer be able to opt out of the program with compensation. Taking unilateral action was not enough for the government. It also had to hold a gun to the provinces' heads. This new quarrel between the two ministers will not help to warm up their relationship. What is the reality: productive discussions with the provinces or the April 1st ultimatum?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is clear: we are having productive discussions with the provinces.

We continue to have those discussions to get better results from investments in job training that leads to real jobs.

I should also point out that this government has increased tax transfers to Quebec by 65%, or \$7.6 billion. In yesterday's budget, the government also announced an increase of \$1.8 billion in transfers to Quebec.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is turning a deaf ear not only to the provinces, but also to municipalities.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Union des municipalités du Québec and the mayor of Montreal have all denounced the budget's silence on social housing. There is no specific commitment or long-term plan. Worse still, cuts of \$1.5 billion are expected over the next five years.

Will the minister review his plans and work with the municipalities to find solutions to the crisis affecting thousands of families?

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has supported the budget that we delivered yesterday. It has seen the great things that are in that budget.

On the issue of housing, we continue to work with our stakeholders and with the provinces and municipalities on this issue.

Let me remind that member of what our government has done and the major investments we have made, such as \$2 billion to renovate existing housing, \$1.25 billion to renew our investment in affordable housing, and renewed investment in our homelessness partnering strategy.

The federal government is doing its part. More importantly, the Canadian taxpayers are doing their part.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some of that money referred to by the minister was actually from Jack Layton, not from the minister.

Oral Questions

Working people trying to find a place to live in Vancouver—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Julian: We had an NDP budget, the best budget ever.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for York South—Weston has the floor.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: And they voted against it, Mr. Speaker. Working people trying to find a place to live in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal face real challenges. Prices go up and up, while the Conservatives just stand by and do nothing. As Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi said, there is nothing in this budget for people who live in cities across Canada.

Can the minister please explain why this budget did nothing to address the housing crisis?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if it was Mr. Layton's idea, it is very surprising, or maybe not surprising, that the opposition again voted against every form of support we have brought to help those who are vulnerable in Canada.

The fact is that we have spent \$14.5 billion since 2006 to help those who need affordable housing. Together with our partners, we have helped over 880,000 families and individuals.

The opposition members vote against it. They have no plan to help those who are vulnerable, except raising their taxes. We will support them and we will support them with real results.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2014 is based on our government's support for science, technology and innovation, in order to create jobs and economic growth in Canada.

Could the Minister of Science and Technology explain to the House how our government is helping colleges, universities and research institutes to become leaders on the world stage?

[*English*]

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2014 announced Canada's first research excellence fund to support our post-secondary institutions to build on key strengths in science, technology, and innovation and become world leaders in a given field of research.

Amit Chakma, chair of U15, Canada's key research universities, said it best:

This will enable us to make new discoveries we will mobilize for the benefit of all Canadians, strengthen regional and national economies and increase our country's innovative capacity.

* * *

• (1455)

[*Translation*]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the years prior to the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, MMA had multiple

infractions of a safety rule that requires that a minimum number of handbrakes be applied to secure a train. Despite this abysmal safety record, no minister ever imposed any penalties on these offending companies.

Can the minister explain how, under Liberal and Conservative governments, MMA was able to repeatedly break safety rules without ever facing the consequences?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, there are several investigations ongoing after the derailments in Lac-Mégantic. One of the investigations is the Transportation Safety Board, another is the Sûreté du Québec, and two others are Transport Canada investigations. If this company is found to have violated the rules and regulations of this country, it will absolutely be penalized to the ultimate extent of the law.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand 21 violations by the MMA rail company on which nothing has been done. In fact, only five days after those horrific events in Lac-Mégantic, MMA committed another violation only five kilometres from Lac-Mégantic.

For years, nothing had been done to stop these violations. In yesterday's budget nothing was being done there either. How can we trust the Conservatives to keep us safe?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that our government, over the past number of years, has done a lot to fund rail safety, and every single time that member voted against it. She cannot stand in the House today and tell us that we do not respect the safety of our citizens.

I would like to again reiterate that if MMA is found to have violated the rules and regulations of this country, it will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of our law.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians will pay the price for this very disappointing budget.

Veterans are shown very little gratitude for their years of service. Because of constant pressure from the NDP, there may be improvements to the funeral and burial program. However, it is downright shocking that the Conservatives are investing in computers instead of veterans' service offices, which they have just closed.

Why are the Conservatives not listening to veterans' demands instead of saving money at their expense?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me correct the record. Economic action plan 2014 builds on our government's strong record of support for veterans since 2006, which includes \$2 billion to enhance the new veterans charter programs and services for seriously injured veterans; \$65 million to enhance the Last Post Fund for Canadian veterans, on top of the \$108 million announced yesterday; \$282 million to shovel veterans' driveways, cut their grass, and clean their homes; \$10 million per year to create five new operational stress injury clinics.

Those parties, and that party in particular, voted against all those items.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is easy to balance a budget when they take away money from disabled veterans and armed forces personnel.

The Minister of National Defence knows very well. He knows the name of Corporal—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has the floor.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence knows very well, because I handed him the file, of Corporal Robert MacIver of Beaver Bank, Nova Scotia. He has served this country with great distinction, and overseas. Unfortunately, because of his service, he suffers from severe psychological wounds.

What does the government do? Instead of helping him, it kicks him out a few months shy of his tenth year, which means he and his family will lose out on hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential benefits.

My question, then, is on behalf of Robert MacIver and his family. Will the Minister of National Defence now allow Robert to stay in the military a tenth year, or will he stand up and face the camera and tell him why he is kicking him out?

• (1500)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank that member for his service to the armed forces. As I have said before, the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Chief of Military Personnel work with the members of the Canadian Armed Forces to ensure they are not released until they are prepared. Every possible accommodation is made to ensure these soldiers are kept in the forces and provided with the best possible support.

That said, I have asked my officials to look into the particular case the member has raised.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Finance agree with what the Minister of Human Resources seems to be saying?

According to the minister, if a province is doing a good job of connecting those looking for work with jobs—and the minister acknowledged that Quebec is doing a good job—that province can keep its share of the \$300 million that the Minister of Finance wants to take from provincial programs.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the government is looking for an agreement with the provinces so that it can deliver the Canada job grant and get the best possible result in matching training with real jobs. It just makes sense. This is the Minister of Finance who used the 2007 budget to invest \$500 million in the labour market agreement. We hope to come to an agreement with the provinces soon.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it is the ice storm in Ontario and Quebec or fires in Alberta, Canadians are strongest when standing together. That is why Ontarians were appalled to be shortchanged to the tune of billions of dollars by the Conservative budget yesterday. Ontarians need transfer payment protection to build our economy, but instead are being penalized for being the leanest provincial government in Canada.

Why are the three failed Mike Harris ministers, responsible for the tragedies of Walkerton and elsewhere, continuing to punish the people of Ontario rather than fighting for them?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I had not heard Premier Harris' name in a long time, but that was the last time we balanced the budget. I remember it well.

Hon. Tony Clement: I was there too.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Yes, you were there as well.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget did nothing to move the Ring of Fire project forward. Communities we met are still waiting for the federal government to make this a priority.

The President of the Treasury Board once promised that this project would improve the quality of life for this region. Why did the Minister of Finance fail to act? Where is the federal government leadership? Where is their plan to work with our communities and move this project forward?

Oral Questions

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Ring of Fire is a legacy resource development project with the potential to contribute significantly to the economic future of northern Ontario. Our government is committed to responsible resource development that creates jobs and economic growth for our region. To that end, we will continue to work collaboratively with first nations, other levels of government, and industry to ensure that the Ring of Fire offers long-term sustainability for communities across northern Ontario.

• (1505)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, based on the budget, it appears this is not a priority for them.

[*Translation*]

Of course, there is significant potential for resource development in the Ring of Fire, but for this project to be sustainable, first nations communities needs to be a major partner. Despite the Conservative promises to reopen talks, we are still waiting to see results. Yesterday's budget made no proposals for moving things forward in the Ring of Fire. What is the Conservative plan for getting this project back on track?

[*English*]

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are three certainties here.

First, from Muskoka to the Manitoba border, our government will continue to focus on community economic development, business growth, competitiveness, and innovation that create jobs and long-term prosperity. We will continue to ensure that communities and businesses in northern Ontario have the tools they need to have a strong, diversified economy, working with all levels of government to that end.

Second, the NDP will vote against it. Third, it will shamelessly try to take credit for it.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, our government doubled the financial benefit available to a veteran's family from \$3,600 to \$7,300, plus an average of \$1,200 for burial costs. That is a total of \$8,500 available to a veteran's family, making the Canadian Last Post Fund one of the most generous compared with our allies.

Would the Minister of Veterans Affairs please update the House on the important changes announced yesterday in economic action plan 2014?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government and I have the utmost respect for the brave men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces, our veterans, and their families.

In economic action plan 2014, we are expanding the funeral and burial benefits to ensure that modern day veterans of modest means can have a dignified burial. Do not only take my word for it. The

Royal Canadian Legion just yesterday said that it was "...very pleased that the issue of a dignified funeral for the most vulnerable, low income Veterans has finally been resolved.... [T]he Government lived up to their commitment...".

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TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has answered only one question on the budget, and he barely answered that. I wonder if he would not mind standing in his place and explaining to the House what his position is on income splitting.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member for Markham—Unionville that I am standing in my place. The budget is not balanced yet, as he may have noted yesterday. We hope and we expect that it will be balanced next year.

We remain committed to tax relief for Canadian families.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our ancestors passed on countless cultural treasures and traditions, such as ice canoeing on the St. Lawrence. We must protect these traditions so that we too can pass them on to future generations.

In 2003, UNESCO created the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. That was 10 years ago, but under the Liberals and the Conservatives, Canada has still not signed the convention.

Does the minister intend to sign the convention, and will she ensure that ice canoeing is included?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. The minister is focused on this issue. It is indeed an issue that we are pursuing, and we will get back to him with an answer shortly.

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THE BUDGET

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, our government outlined the economic action plan for 2014. In that plan, we detailed just how we would create jobs and grow the economy right across Canada. In fact, there are some specific benefits in there for western Canada.

I would ask the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification to stand and outline all the benefits for western Canada.

• (1510)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, middle-class families across western Canada know that in order to balance a budget, there has to be a plan to either generate more revenue or spend less. Make more, or spend less. I am not sure if these families would let the leader of the Liberal Party have his hands on their chequebook, given his assertions that budgets just balance themselves.

Folks in Fort McMurray know well that the Conservative Party is the one that keeps taxes low and stands up for the energy sector and the jobs it creates. Folks in Fort MacLeod know that our investments in federal disaster recovery will impact their lives. Municipalities across western Canada know that we are investing through the building Canada plan, with \$50 billion for infrastructure.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's do-nothing budget delivered nothing to address the first nations housing crisis. In my own riding, families in Manto Sipi have no other choice but to live in mould infested homes. Despite tireless efforts, the chief and the grand chief have had to come to Ottawa to push the Conservative government to act.

Will the government work with Manto Sipi to address this housing crisis? More importantly, will it see the value of putting an end to third world living conditions in our own country?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as shown in the budget yesterday, we are committed in economic action plan 2014 to improve in an effective way the standard of living and life on reserve in Canada. It is a priority of ours.

Yesterday, there was an unprecedented \$1.9 billion in incremental dollars that will be invested in first nation education. I thought the member would stand up and thank us for it, but she has not.

Again, yesterday, we have \$22 million for aboriginal justice.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in defeating the deficit, the Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance had a choice. They could have gone after the dead money, the \$600 billion now sloshing around in the bank accounts of corporations, a staggering 32% of our GDP, or go after the live retirees, retired federal civil servants, breaking faith with promises by doubling their health care premiums.

Would the Prime Minister tell us why he chose to go after live retirees instead of dead money?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we maintain tax rates for corporations. We expect them to pay their taxes and we go after them when they do not pay their taxes. However, the question that was asked here concerns the voluntary supplemental health benefits for retirees.

What we are saying is that we believe it is still a subject of discussion at a bargaining table. We have been very clear that we believe that when it is a voluntary plan like that, a Cadillac plan, retirees should pay their own fair share, which would be 50% of the

Routine Proceedings

plan. It would still make it one of the best plans one could get in this country.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to table a document listing all of the infractions that have been committed by MMA, relating to my previous question.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Economic Relations held in Ankara, Turkey, March 14 to March 16, 2011; the Sub-Committee on Energy and Environmental Security held in Texas, U.S.A., June 24 to June 28, 2013; the Defence and Security Committee held in Washington, D.C. and in Dallas, Texas, U.S.A., July 9 to July 12, 2013; and, the 59th annual session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Dubrovnik, Croatia, October 11 to October 14, 2013.

• (1515)

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group respecting its participation in the following meetings: the 6th Annual Southeastern United States-Canadian Provinces Alliance Conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from July 14 to July 16, 2013; and the U.S. congressional meetings held in Washington, D.C. on February 26 and February 27, 2013.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in contraband tobacco).

[Translation]

The committee considered the bill and decided to report it to the House without amendment.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee advises that pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2) the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business met to consider items added to the order of precedence as a result of the replenishment of Wednesday, January 29, 2014, and recommended that the items listed herein, which it has determined should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2) the report is deemed adopted.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill C-501, An Act respecting a National Hunting, Trapping and Fishing Heritage Day.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendments.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in relation to Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

* * *

[Translation]

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES DEVOLUTION ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, all questions necessary to dispose of the report stage of Bill C-15, An Act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement and to repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, other Acts and certain orders and regulations, be deemed put, recorded divisions deemed demanded and the votes deferred to the end of government orders today.

When C-15 is called for debate at third reading, members rising to speak in the first round may divide their time with another member by so indicating to the Chair and any recorded division demanded on Thursday, February 13, 2014, in relation to proceedings on ways and means Motion No. 6 shall stand deferred to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment on Monday, February 24, 2014.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I move the following travel motions:

that in relation to its study of the prebudget consultation 2014, 10 members of the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to travel to Washington, DC, and New York, New York, United States of America, in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee;

that notwithstanding the motion adopted by the House of Commons on December 6, 2013, in relation to its studies on the benefits for Canada in joining the Pacific Alliance as a full member and on the benefits for Canada of the trans-Pacific partnership, six members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Chile and Peru in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee;

that in relation to its study of the review of the Canadian transportation safety regime, transportation of dangerous goods and safety management systems, seven members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities be authorized to travel to Vancouver and Kitimat, British Columbia, Edmonton, Alberta, and Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee;

that in relation to its study of the review of the Canadian transportation safety regime, transportation of dangerous goods and safety management systems, seven members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities be authorized to travel to Sarnia and Toronto, Ontario, Montreal, Quebec, and Saint John, New Brunswick, in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee;

that in relation to its study of the review of the Canadian transportation safety regime, transportation of dangerous goods and safety management systems, seven members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities be authorized to travel to Williston, North Dakota, and Houston, Texas, United States of America, in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee;

that in relation to its study of opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce, 10 members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be authorized to travel to Quebec City, Quebec, in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee;

that in relation to its study of opportunities for aboriginal persons in the workforce, 10 members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be authorized to travel to Prince Rupert, Prince George, and Williams Lake, British Columbia, in the winter-spring of 2014, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That is all of the travel motions.

Routine Proceedings

• (1520)

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose these motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: The hon. opposition House leader.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, for those unfortunate enough to have been watching at home during that exhaustive and somewhat non-titillating expression by the chief government whip, the point of order I rise on is that this is somewhat unprecedented, in terms of bringing to the House such motions.

Typically parties are able to establish the working conditions for our committees and do the good work of Parliament.

What is also unprecedented is that the government has absolutely refused Canada-wide public hearings on its unfair and rigged elections bill, in which the Conservatives are seeking to change the fundamental democratic values in this country. Until the Conservatives have public hearings, we will—

The Speaker: On a point of order, I will recognize the hon. chief government whip, but when unanimous consent is sought and it is not given, there is usually no debate about why it is not given. I hope it is a point of order.

The hon. chief government whip.

Hon. John Duncan: The point of order, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that these travel motions were arrived at by a joint committee that is all party, and it is ridiculous to be held hostage by such a move by the official opposition.

• (1525)

The Speaker: I know there are regularly scheduled House leaders meetings, and perhaps the next one will prove fruitful in coming to some type of agreement, but at this time there is, quite obviously, no unanimous consent.

Presenting petitions, the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

* * *

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the citizens of Fleetwood—Port Kells to present a petition signed by dozens of local residents who are outraged by the unnecessary death of a young woman killed by a drunk driver. The petitioners call upon Parliament to enact tougher laws, including mandatory sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death. They also ask that the offence of impaired driving causing death be redefined as vehicular manslaughter.

ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have with me a petition on behalf of residents of the area of Toronto. It asks that the government protect land around the healthy and sustainable Rouge National Park; that it ensure it strengthens and

implements the ecological vision, policies, and integrity of the plans, the green belt plan, the Rouge national heritage action plan, and the Oak Ridges Moraine convention plan; that it protect and restore the 600-metre wide wooded main ecological corridor linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine and Rouge National Park; and that it conduct a rational, scientific, and transparent public planning process to create Rouge National Park's boundaries, legislation, and strategic plan and include first nations and Friends of the Rouge Watershed on a Rouge National Park planning and advisory board.

[Translation]

VIA RAIL

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by a number of residents from New Brunswick who are very concerned about the cuts to rail service in northern New Brunswick.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, northern New Brunswick service at VIA Rail is being reduced or eliminated and threatened by the closure of certain rail lines, and the residents of northern New Brunswick, understandably, worry about their economic future and access to passenger rail transportation. I am pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a number of petitions from residents of Waterloo region in southwestern Ontario. These petitioners are calling on members of Parliament to condemn discrimination against females that is occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination.

[Translation]

GATINEAU PARK

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions signed by Canadians who urge the House of Commons to adopt legislation that would give Gatineau Park the necessary legal protection to ensure its preservation for future generations.

[English]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present a petition calling to members' attention that organic farming prohibits the use of genetic modification and that the organic sector in Canada depends on alfalfa as a high-protein feed for dairy cattle and other livestock. Therefore, they call upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa, in order to allow proper review of the impact on farmers in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

CANADA POST

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from a number of residents in my riding calling upon the Government of Canada to reverse the cuts to the services announced by Canada Post and to look, instead, for ways to innovate in areas such as postal banking.

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR RETIREES

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of federal retirees who are very concerned about the government's plans to effectively double their health insurance costs. They note that the current cost-sharing formula was part of the contract negotiated by the Government of Canada, the National Joint Council, and the National Association of Federal Retirees. They call on the Government of Canada to honour the contract and continue the existing cost-sharing formula for the Public Service Health Care Plan.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

GATINEAU PARK

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions today.

The first petition is about preserving Gatineau Park. Although this park is not in my riding, I believe that such a fine park can be an asset to all Quebecers and Canadians.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the government to adopt a national transit strategy, something that is sorely needed. Transit is an important issue in my riding, and I am pleased to present this petition.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the day after the do-nothing budget, I am very pleased to present two petitions. The first one is from constituents both in Toronto and in my riding of Trinity—Spadina, calling upon the Government of Canada to provide long-term predictable and non-partisan funding for public transit. They note that road congestion is costing the GTA's economy \$6 billion a year in lost productivity and that the daily commute time is over 80 minutes.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents in Toronto who strongly urge the Government of Canada to immediately legislate a ban on bulk oil tanker traffic off B.C.'s north coast. They note that the project would bring 225 supertankers of a huge size to the pristine northern coast of B.C. each year and that the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline would carry oil 1,178 kilometres from the Alberta oil sands to the coast at Kitimat, B.C.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from dozens and dozens of people who are opposed to cuts to services at Canada Post.

If Canada Post and the Conservatives move forward with this, Canada will be the only G7 country without home mail delivery. The dozens and hundreds of petitioners are opposed to that, and I support them.

[*English*]

ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my first petition today is from my home community of Scarborough—Rouge River where we know that 100 square kilometres of public land assembly surrounds the Rouge River and Duffins Creek watersheds in Toronto, Markham, and Pickering. It is publicly owned provincial, federal, and municipal land. It is home to the endangered mixed Carolinian forests and is the ancestral home of the Mississauga, Huron-Wendat, and Seneca first nations and their sacred burial sites. The petitioners are calling on the government to protect the irreplaceable 100 square kilometres of park public land assembly within a healthy and sustainable Rouge National Park and to conduct a rational, scientific and transparent public planning process to create the Rouge National Park boundaries.

VIA RAIL

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from many constituents of New Brunswick. Considering that VIA Rail service cuts in northern New Brunswick would pose real hardship on many residents for their personal transportation as well as a lot of the local economy and commerce in the community, the petitioners implore the Government of Canada to undertake all measures to reinstate daily round-trip VIA Rail passenger service between Montreal and Halifax through the cities of Campbellton, Bathurst, and Miramichi, New Brunswick.

[*Translation*]

GATINEAU PARK

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Gatineau Park is one of the most frequently visited parks in Canada, and a park that I have enjoyed. Its boundaries are not recognized by any federal legislation and, therefore, Canadians are calling on the House of Commons to pass legislation that would give Gatineau Park the necessary legal protection to ensure its preservation for future generations.

Routine Proceedings

GATINEAU PARK

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition concerning the protection of Gatineau Park. The petitioners call for legislation that would give Gatineau Park the necessary legal protection to ensure its preservation for future generations.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions.

The first one calls for legislation to protect Gatineau Park, which was created by an act of Parliament, as members will recall. We want to protect the park for future generations. The park must be protected immediately and we hope that the government will give a positive answer soon.

● (1535)

VIA RAIL

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition that I have the honour to present is about saving VIA Rail services in eastern Canada. It is signed by more than 24,000 people. I am holding just a few of the many signatures collected.

We hope that the government will invest in VIA Rail services in eastern Canada, which are so important for economic growth and also for tourism. Transportation in this vast country is also a fundamental right.

[*English*]

ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present this petition on behalf of some folks from the Toronto area regarding the funds to create the Rouge national park.

The petitioners support the creation of the park; however, they have concerns about the draft Rouge national urban park concept.

They want to ensure that existing visions and plans that have been conducted in the past are respected in the creation of this park; that key tracts of land are protected; that there is a rational, scientific, and transparent public planning process involved to create the national park's boundary; and that first nations and friends of the Rouge watershed are included on the Rouge national park planning and advisory board.

[*Translation*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to submit to the House a petition that attests to the need to renew the programs designed to improve public transit infrastructure in the country and to provide adequate federal funding to support those initiatives.

ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of a number of my fellow citizens in Toronto, I am pleased to present a petition about the Rouge National Urban Park.

This park is very important. We must ensure its ecological survival and secure the green corridor between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine.

GATINEAU PARK

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am presenting today deals with Gatineau Park. I appreciate the fact that my colleagues have also presented petitions calling for federal legislation to protect this important park that attracts so many visitors from across the country.

I hope that the government will support our initiative.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition calling on the House to pass legislation that will provide Gatineau Park with the legal protections necessary to preserve it for future generations. It is important for the House to pass this legislation in order to protect the park, from its boundaries to its endangered species.

VIA RAIL

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions for you today.

The first petition deplores any budget cuts or rail service reductions in eastern Canada. That will have many adverse consequences for the region's economy as well as for the viability of a number of businesses and business people. Rail is one of the safest, most economical and most environmentally friendly means of transportation.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition today is about creating a national public transit strategy.

Like me and the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, the petitioners believe that Canadians deserve a reliable, fast and affordable public transit system, especially because of traffic congestion, which causes loss of productivity for those who commute in and to Montreal every day, and because of environmental pollution.

GATINEAU PARK

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition for the legal protection of Gatineau Park.

This issue is important to all Quebeckers. The environment should not be protected only at the local level. We need people to collaborate and stand together.

I am very happy with the work done by my colleague from Hull—Aylmer and other members from the region. This is a very important issue. This is not the last time we will be talking about this kind of protection. We are really hoping for a positive response to this issue.

* * *

● (1540)

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

The Budget

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair would like to take a moment to provide some information to the House regarding the management of private members' business.

[*English*]

As members know, after the order of precedence is replenished, the Chair reviews the new items so as to alert the House to bills which at first glance appear to impinge under financial prerogative of the Crown.

This allows members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion to present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, following the January 29 replenishment of the order of precedence with 15 new items, I wish to inform the House that Bill C-568, An Act respecting former Canadian Forces members, standing in the name of the member for Saint-Jean, gives the Chair some concern as to the spending provisions it contemplates.

[*English*]

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation to accompany this bill, or any of the other bills now on the order of precedence, to do so at an early opportunity.

I thank hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of Canadians from coast to coast to coast who have been left out in the cold by the government and by the budget.

A budget is supposed to be a government's declaration of priorities. If that is true, then budget 2014 makes it clear that the only jobs the government is interested in protecting are their own.

We have heard for weeks that this would be a do-nothing budget, that the Conservatives had no intention of taking real action on the issues that matter to Canadians, because they wanted to wait until an election year to propose anything.

In this sense, and in this sense only, the budget did not disappoint. There is nothing to help Canadians save and invest for retirement. There is nothing to help create the next generation of middle-class jobs, and there is nothing to make life more affordable for Canadians.

Instead what we have is the most cynical budget in years. What little so-called new spending there is will not get out the door until years down the line, after the next election.

[*Translation*]

This budget is chock full of empty words and half-measures that will help absolutely no one. With this budget, the Conservatives seem to be telling Canadians: "Sorry, but if we help you now, are we really going to have a better shot at getting re-elected next year?"

Canadians cannot afford to wait until next year. They need help now. Canadians deserve better.

[*English*]

Of course, this should come as no surprise. This is a government, after all, that has repeatedly missed the mark when it comes to responding to the priorities of Canadians. Take last year's budget, for instance. It introduced nearly \$8 billion in new taxes, increasing the price of thousands of goods and services that Canadians rely on every day.

Budget 2013 promised what the Minister of Finance called the largest and longest federal infrastructure plan in Canadian history. However, it took just a few days for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to expose that this so-called investment was a sham. The PBO found that the budget was nothing more than a shell game, that it delivered \$5.8 billion less for infrastructure funding over five years. Instead of increasing funding at a time when our cities and towns are in dire need of support, the Conservatives actually cut it.

Who can forget the dead-on-arrival Canada job grant? It was a \$300-million cut to provincial skills training that still has provincial leaders up in arms. I hear from community organizations in my riding about this, and I am sure members are hearing about this across the country. Instead of listening to provincial ministers' recommendations, the Conservatives steamrolled ahead with their own agenda, more or less like they do in Parliament. A year later, what do we have to show for it? There is nothing more than a \$2.5-million advertising campaign for a program that does not even exist.

This is the Conservative economic record. What a waste of taxpayers' dollars: reckless cuts, missed projections, and utter mismanagement.

The Budget

Budget 2014 continues down the same path. It fails to tackle Canada's stubbornly high unemployment rate, which is especially high for young Canadians, who are graduating with tens of thousands of dollars of student debt. It proposes to balance the books on the backs of workers and employers by raiding the EI fund to pad its surplus. Now, Canadians know this story. Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have stolen \$57 billion from the EI fund to pay for corporate tax cuts and to mask deficits.

The budget also continues the attack on public servants, by cutting billions of dollars from retiree health benefits. These are benefits that people had planned for. They had retired hoping that they could count on them. However, once they are out the door, once they are retired, suddenly the rules of the game are changing. This is a disgrace to the public sector. It is a disgrace to working people.

The budget also delays billions of dollars of procurement spending to boost Conservative fortunes.

The fact is that 320,000 more Canadians are unemployed now than before the recession. Those who have found work are often left juggling two, or even three, part-time jobs. Others are working contracts, split shifts, often with barely enough time to see their kids as they head from one job to the next, especially with the gridlock in many of our big cities. Speaking of which, in Toronto alone, a staggering 50% of people cannot find full-time stable work. It takes them hours to criss-cross the city, often for low wages. There is nothing in this budget to help them.

There is nothing to tackle household debt. Despite the fact that the Bank of Canada calls it the biggest domestic risk facing our economy today, there is nothing to tackle this household debt.

Last month, the Governor of the Bank of Canada Stephen Poloz warned that our economy will continue to struggle for at least the next two years. He suggested there is little else that the bank can do to help. That is because the current Conservative government has presided over the largest expansion of household debt in Canadian history: 166% of disposal income. From Surrey to St. John's, household bills are piling up, and household budgets are stretched like never before.

We learned just this week that consumer debt is up by more than 9% in the last 12 months alone, to a staggering \$1.4 trillion of household debt. With already historic low interest levels, the Bank of Canada is stuck between a rock and a hard place, and yesterday's budget will not help one bit.

• (1545)

[Translation]

This budget has absolutely no proposals to stimulate the growth of small businesses. It has absolutely no provisions to help seniors retire in dignity or to help veterans deal with the closure of nine Veterans Affairs offices.

There are no proposals to deal with tax evasion; no proposals to deal with social inequality, which is reaching levels we have not seen since the great depression; and there are no proposals to help the 1.3 million unemployed Canadians get back into the job market.

Instead, this government has chosen to continue along its road of austerity, even though more and more economists are coming together to tell us that it is doing us more harm than good.

• (1550)

[English]

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, by 2017 direct federal program spending as a percentage of Canada's GDP will have fallen to its lowest level since 2001. At this pace, federal spending will have been slashed a whopping \$90 billion between 2010 and 2017. These are services; things that people want to count on. These are safety inspectors. These are the people who staff service counters, whether it is Service Canada or veterans services. These are the people who help us access government programs.

As Tim Harper wrote Monday in the *Toronto Star*:

Continued government austerity has thrown into question whether Ottawa can, or more importantly, wants to continue to provide services Canadians expect.

I guess that is still an open question. We are talking about services and benefits that Canadians have relied on for generations, that we have come to think of as defining us as a nation.

Time and time again, the government has told Canadians that we have to accept less and that our children have to accept less. When it comes to health care, employment insurance, old age security, and services for veterans, we all have to accept less, even though our country is richer than ever before. All these services have met the government's axe.

Budget 2014 fails to strengthen any of these services or reverse any of these disastrous cuts. Instead, once again, it chooses ideological dogma over common sense. It is future generations, our kids and our grandkids, who are going to pay the price.

[Translation]

Clearly, some are sheltered from the Conservatives' budget cuts and inaction. Like the Liberals before them, the Conservatives are continuing to give tax handouts to business. While the middle class is being told to tighten its belt yet again, friends of the Conservatives and the Liberals are helping themselves to the goodies. It is clear who they are working for.

We New Democrats on this side of the House know who we are working for, and Canadians know it too. They know that New Democrats, unlike the Conservatives and the Liberals, are working for them, for all Canadians.

[English]

Just last week, the International Monetary Fund warned the government about the very same reckless austerity that we saw in yesterday's budget. The IMF stated that, "fiscal policy should strike the right balance between supporting growth and rebuilding fiscal buffers".

The Budget

It went on to highlight some serious threats to our economy, from skyrocketing household debt to continued fragility in the U.S. and Europe. Those are the very sorts of risks that unchecked austerity leaves us exposed to; in other words, we are not getting the right balance. We now see that the government has ignored that warning.

That is not all. The government has ignored the fact that Canada's economic outlook has been repeatedly downgraded by the IMF and others. According to the Conference Board of Canada's report last month, our fledgling dollar is a sign of Canada's lack of growth prospects.

Despite all this, despite the warning from financial experts and the struggles of middle-class Canadians right across the country, the government has chosen to introduce a do-nothing budget.

If all of this sounds familiar, it should. We must remember that this is the same government which insisted in 2008 that there would be no recession in Canada, even as the global economy teetered on the brink of collapse. This is the same government that refused to act until it was forced to act by the opposition, and thank goodness for that. It helped get the country out of the recession.

Canadians are tired of waiting for the government to get its act together. We do not have to accept less. We can and should strive for more. New Democrats are ready to do something about it.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

While the Conservatives continue to twiddle their thumbs and ignore the concerns of Canadians, we New Democrats are proposing practical and specific solutions to help Canadians.

We know that Canadians work hard and that they deserve a break. This is why New Democrats have established a clear plan to protect consumers and make life more affordable. We plan to limit the ATM fees that Canadians have to pay each time they want access to their own money.

We plan to fight the abusive practices of payday lenders, who are charging interest at rates that can go as high as 1,000%. We plan to put an end to scandalous gas prices and to ensure that all Canadians have access to low-interest credit cards.

These simple measures would help to alleviate Canadian household debt and would not cost the government a cent. All across the country, Canadians have told us that measures like that would have a very positive impact on their family budgets. However, just a few weeks ago, the Conservatives voted against an NDP motion that would have limited ATM fees to 50¢. The Conservatives voted against a motion designed to make the lives of Canadians more affordable, while bank profits continue to rise.

[*English*]

The Conservatives can talk about being more consumer-friendly, but when it comes to taking real action, Canadians know where they stand.

New Democrats have also called on the government to reverse the disastrous cuts to old age security, and to take immediate action to strengthen retirement security. Far too many seniors in this country are going to be facing a retirement crisis. In the past two years, the

current government has really broken faith with Canada's seniors, seniors who have built this country and who now deserve to retire in dignity.

The Conservatives have hiked the retirement age from 65 to 67 years; they have turned their back on a plan to expand the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan, Canadians' best and surest hope for a secure retirement; and as many as 5.8 million Canadians, nearly one-third of our workforce, will see a sharp drop in their standard of living when they retire. This is the retirement crisis so many people are referring to.

Provincial governments, labour unions, and pension experts have called on the Conservatives to move forward with plans to increase our public pensions. Even the chief executive officer of CIBC has spoken out about the need to involve government in finding a solution to this retirement security crisis. However, as we saw once again yesterday, the Conservative government still refuses to act.

Unlike the Conservatives, New Democrats also focused on creating good middle-class jobs right here in Canada instead of shipping them overseas. We have put forward ideas to help small and medium-sized businesses create high-quality jobs. We know this is a priority for Canadians, and the current government is letting them down.

We have called for a youth employment tax credit to help make sure that we give the next generation of Canadians the same opportunities that our parents gave us.

Canada is among the most entrepreneurial countries in the world, and more and more businesses are being started by young people. Even through the recession, Canadian small businesses continued to thrive and multiply, but for far too long, too many of our small businesses have stayed small. Since 2006, the number of small businesses in this country has grown by more than 44,000, but the number of medium-sized businesses has actually shrunk. That is a trend that cannot continue, and that is why we are going to work together with Canadian businesses, especially small businesses, to help them grow and prosper in the 21st century. We want to see them grow and to be the best that they can be so that they are investing and creating good-quality jobs right across this country.

These are the kinds of solutions New Democrats were hoping to see in this budget. They are the kinds of solutions Canadians were hoping to see.

While the government has failed Canadians once again, I can tell members this. These are exactly the kinds of solutions that Canadians can expect from the New Democratic government in 2015.

The Budget

•(1600)

[Translation]

All across the country, those in the middle class are having to tighten their belts like never before. They deserve a government that is committed to focusing on their priorities. At the moment, they have to put up with a government that tells them that they have to go it alone and that they had better get used to it.

This is not the Canada that our parents left to us and it is not the Canada that we want to leave to our children. That is why the New Democrats will vote against this budget and why we would like to propose the following amendments:

[English]

I move, seconded by the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

this House not approve the budgetary policy of the government as it:

- a) Fails to take any meaningful action to create jobs while 1.3 million Canadians are unemployed;
- b) Refuses to work cooperatively with the provinces on federal transfers, skills training, and infrastructure funding;
- c) Does nothing to cap ATM fees, crack down on payday lenders or rein in credit card rates;
- d) Does not introduce a youth hiring and training tax credit to combat soaring youth unemployment;
- e) Threatens to unilaterally impose the Canada Job Grant over the unanimous objection of the provinces;
- f) Pushes ahead with office closures and cuts to veterans' services;
- g) Repeats previous governments' misuse of EI funds; and
- h) Slashes billions of dollars from the health care plans of Canadian public service retirees.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, does the seconder of the motion have to be present here in the chamber in order to be a seconder?

•(1605)

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sure if he absolutely has to, but he is here.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, repeatedly throughout my colleague's speech, she inaccurately referred to this as the “do-nothing budget”.

I have not had the chance to read all of the 400 pages in this budget, but as the chair of the environment committee, I did quickly go to the section on the environment to see what initiatives our government is proposing in this budget. I do not have time to read anywhere near all of them, but I am going to read a few of them.

The budget would protect Canada's national parks by providing over \$390 million to make improvements to highways, bridges, and dams located in our national parks. It would support conservation by investing an additional \$15 million in recreational fisheries conservation partnerships. It would support projects that would support the conservation of recreational fishing habitats.

I could go on and on about environmental initiatives, but I know that my colleague is very supportive of unions, so I have a question

for her. I would like to give her a quote from Canada's Building Trades Unions, which said, “After years of being a mere add-on to post-secondary education, apprenticeship is being noticed by our federal government”. It went on to say, “The way apprentices are being treated has changed and they are now, thanks to measures introduced in the 2014 budget, treated more like their colleagues in college and university training”.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague if she would support the unions in their call for the support that we are giving to the trade unions by giving support to apprenticeship training, which is one of the most lacking areas of training in our country. If we are interested in improving the lot of middle-class Canadians, why would she not support this budget?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I cannot let the comments on environmental measures go by without expressing my serious concern about the demonizing of environmental groups that the government has engaged in. Whether by calling them radicals or terrorists, it is certainly adding to the chill in the environmental community. These organizations do a lot of good work in advocating for a sustainable environment, and there is genuine concern about the approach of the government with respect to charities.

I am also a strong supporter of apprenticeships. I am not sure that what is being proposed by the government will create one more apprenticeship in this country. What it does do is offer the opportunity for people who are already in apprenticeships to take on more debt.

We already have a challenge of household debt in this country. What would be good would be to expand the apprenticeship programs, but then the government would have to co-operate with the provinces, and the current government seems completely incapable of sitting down, having a reasonable discussion, and coming to a compromise with our provinces and territories.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her comments on the budget. I know how passionately she cares.

There are 400 pages in this book. There are some good things in it, but I would say that about 375 pages are reannouncing things from the past or promoting things that are going to happen if everything falls into place in 2016. There is very little in here that is going to do anything much today.

I would like to ask my colleague a question on the issue of the infrastructure needs in our cities and throughout the country.

We have certainly had a very difficult winter. Our cities have had a lot of problems when it comes to aging and crumbling infrastructure. Never mind the bridges; I am just talking about the issues throughout the country and in Toronto in particular. We recently had an estimated \$275 million in damage from the ice storm. I see nothing in here, no comment at all, about helping cities to deal with those challenges they are facing.

I would like to hear some comment on the infrastructure gap that Canada continues to face and the on the very small amount of money in this budget for infrastructure. It is really dealing with two important bridges that we want to see go forward, and some small craft harbour points; that is all that is there.

The Budget

I would like to hear the member's position on the infrastructure issue.

● (1610)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I certainly share my colleague's serious concern about the lack of actual infrastructure spending. There is a real shell game going on in this budget with money that has been previously announced and is being reannounced, and we still do not know the details of many of the programs. Then there is infrastructure money that we are told will be spent in the future; what we really need is infrastructure spending now.

We saw a major problem with our hydro in Toronto. People in our area were without hydro for more than a week, which created serious hardship for many over the holiday period. There were very cold days, and a lot of people with mobility problems and seniors were challenged by this situation.

We have problems with hydro infrastructure, roads, water, and sewage, but I think the number one infrastructure issue in Toronto, and I thank my colleague for raising it, is gridlock. It is identified by the Toronto Board of Trade as our number one economic issue. It costs our economy in Toronto alone about \$6 billion. It is an investment that we should be making now to improve our transit infrastructure, not to mention all the other infrastructure needs we have.

The government is failing our large cities by not investing in our infrastructure now. It is really shocking that it is abandoning our major urban centres.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of my colleague opposite. I used to have her role as the official opposition finance critic and I know it is always challenging. She certainly gives great credit to her assignment.

I have three questions.

The member suggested that this is an austerity budget. That is a term in Europe that has become associated with governments that are significantly reducing their program spending, often by 10%, 20%, or 30%, to deal with massive fiscal calamity.

However, in this budget, program spending is actually relatively flat. There is actually no reduction, because transfers to persons and provinces continue to grow at a very significant pace.

Would she not agree that it is inaccurate to characterize that as extreme austerity when, in fact, we continue to see massive increases in transfers to province—an increase of \$65 billion over the past seven years, for example?

Second, she suggested criticism of one of the most exciting elements of the budget, from my perspective, that being the new apprenticeship loan. This is a measure that apprentices, the polytechnics in Canada, the career colleges, the community colleges have long asked for. Because apprentice training periods are typically about eight weeks, they were excluded from access to the Canada student loan program. Why would she and the NDP be against giving apprentice students access to the same financing option, if they choose, that regular post-secondary students have?

Why should they be treated as second-class students? Why does she disagree with all of the colleges and the apprentice organizations themselves, which called for precisely this measure?

Third, in question period the other day, one of her colleagues opposed our shutting down of the current investor immigrant program, which effectively gives away Canadian permanent residency to people who provide a five-year fully-guaranteed \$400,000 loan that they get back after five years, which very typically results in no real investment in Canada.

To be clear, the average investor immigrant pays in federal taxes, over the course of 20 years, \$200,000 less than the average immigrant who arrives as a federal skilled worker and \$100,000 less in federal taxes than someone who arrives as a permanent resident through the live-in caregiver program.

Why would she support giving away Canadian social benefits to wealthy foreigners, many of whom continue to live in tax havens abroad while their dependants use Canadian social programs, and do not pay their fair share of taxes?

With respect, the NDP should have demanded years ago that we shut that down.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his questions. I know he is a member in this House who always does his homework.

In the brief time I have remaining, let me try to deal with each of the issues he has raised.

I do not think he has ever heard me, in this place or in public, accuse the government of “extreme” austerity, but clearly the government is focused on austerity. We have seen cuts take place in program after program, and over the years tens of billions of dollars have gone out of government spending. In our program growth, we are not keeping pace with population growth or with inflation. I think our programs are increasingly focused on an approach to Canadian families that is more in keeping with *Leave It to Beaver* from the 1950s than it is with the modern family of today.

Therefore, clearly, we are on a path of austerity, but not to same degree as Europe. I give him that.

I did not say I opposed the skilled trades student loan program; my criticism of it is that it is a very small measure to deal with youth unemployment. I am a big fan of the trades and I would like to see a big expansion of skilled trades programs. This is a very tiny measure to that end.

With respect to immigration, I know the member who asked the question is a former immigration minister and knows that dossier well. All I can say is do not get me started, because it is a huge issue in my riding, where families have to wait years for family reunification.

The Budget

There was the tragedy we have seen of many members of our Roma community losing their ability to stay in Canada and being sent back to very unsafe conditions when they were seeking refugee status here. As well, we have very serious concerns about the ability of people to get their documents dealt with by the current government in a timely fashion.

We have huge problems in our immigration system. We would have liked to have seen a more comprehensive approach to immigration, one that would actually help immigrants who come to this country and one that would get their cases dealt with in a timely fashion.

• (1615)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to budget 2014, tabled yesterday at about this time in the House.

Last night on CBC's *The National*, Peter Mansbridge asked the Minister of Finance, "Are there those who are going to lose as a result of today's budget?" The minister's response was quite telling. The minister said, "That's an interesting question. I hadn't thought about it that way, Peter, and I can't think of any, actually".

The Minister of Finance cannot think of any Canadians who will be hurt by the budget.

[Translation]

He tried to sell us the idea that it was a boring budget. However, this budget does nothing to help young Canadians who cannot find decent jobs, and it does next to nothing to help middle-class parents.

[English]

However, when we read the fine print of the budget, and I must assume that the Minister of Finance is aware of the details of his own budget, we see that this is a budget that actually does hurt many Canadians. In fact, it hurts one of our most vulnerable groups, a group to whom we owe so much, and that is Canada's veterans.

The Conservatives' latest budget actually hits our veterans squarely in the pocketbook. It hits them when they are at the medical clinic or at the drug store. For Canadians who bravely served this country and who are now retired and living on fixed incomes, the budget doubles the amount they must pay each month for their medical plan. Yet these cuts to our veterans did not get any coverage in the news last night. Perhaps it is because some of the language in the budget is so cleverly deceptive.

The change the Conservatives are making to the public service health care plan for retirees is one of the single largest items in the budget. By doubling the amount these retirees must pay for their health plan, the Conservatives hope to save roughly \$7.4 billion over six years. That is \$7.4 billion that is being taken from retired Canadians living on fixed incomes. That is not pocket change.

For a measure as big and as important as this, Canadians expect that there should be a lot more detail in the budget to explain who will be affected and by how much, but Conservatives left those details out.

For example, there is no information in the budget about who qualifies for the public service health care plan as a retiree. However,

if we go to the website of the public service health care plan, it has a list of who qualifies for this plan as a retiree. That list includes retired members of the Canadian Forces, our veterans, and retired members of the RCMP. It includes their dependents and their survivors.

This is what these changes will mean for our veterans. For veterans who receive the most basic health care coverage, their annual contributions will go from \$261 to roughly \$550. That is double. Veterans with the most basic family coverage will see their annual contributions go from \$513 to roughly \$1,080. That is an additional \$567 per year these pensioners on fixed incomes will have to pay to cover their prescriptions. That is an extra \$567 retired veterans will have to find so that they and their spouses will not lose their medical coverage.

Yesterday we saw members of the government rise to give the Minister of Finance a standing ovation, over and over again, for his budget. Those members ought to think back to last Remembrance Day, and they ought to think about those brave veterans of World War II, our veterans who still show up each year on November 11, in smaller numbers, and who are still so valued and so worthy of our nation's undying gratitude. I ask them to think of an 88-year-old veteran of World War II who is struggling with diabetes and a heart condition, a grandfather who still cannot talk about what he witnessed in that war. Do the Conservatives actually think this man is living so high on the hog that he ought to be forced to pay double for his medical benefits?

• (1620)

How about the brave men and women who have come back from Afghanistan, veterans who have been medically discharged against their wishes and now find themselves veterans instead of current members of the Canadian Forces? Should the government be making it harder for them to receive the care they need?

What about the survivors, Canadian widows and widowers who are grieving for soldiers and police officers who are no longer with us? Why are the Conservatives balancing the books on the backs of these widows and survivors?

The Conservatives know the hardship these cuts will cause. In fact, an internal audit by the government in late 2009 showed that some veterans were actually having difficulty paying for their health benefits. That audit said:

[Veterans Affairs Canada] staff interviewed noted the importance of this health care coverage for both clients and their families. However, the cost of monthly premiums and deductibles was stated to be an obstacle for some clients.

Instead of listening to this audit, conducted by the government, of Veterans Affairs Canada, the government actually doubled those costs, and now it wants to make it even tougher and more expensive for veterans to get the medical coverage they need. The way the Conservatives are treating our veterans is beneath contempt. It is reprehensible.

The Budget

Last night, the finance minister actually went on national television and told Canadians that he could not think of any person or group in Canada that would lose as a result of this budget. Clearly he is not thinking, and the Conservatives are not thinking, about our veterans. He also is not thinking about current members of the Canadian Armed Forces. He is not thinking about the brave men and women who stand on guard for Canada.

The Conservatives are actually slashing the budget for military procurement by \$3.1 billion in the next few years. They say that our brave members of the Canadian Forces will have to wait for the equipment they need to do their jobs, as if they have not been waiting long enough. The Conservatives have been bungling military procurements for years, and now they have given up on these major purchases until well after the election; so much for the Conservatives supporting our troops. The government simply will not put its money where its mouth is.

This budget is a no-growth budget at a time when Canadian families need growth, jobs, and opportunity. This budget does nothing to help Canadian middle-class families. Too many Canadians are struggling right now under the crushing weight of personal debt. For some, it is because they have lost their jobs. In other cases, it is that they have lost full-time jobs and are struggling to replace those jobs with part-time work, and they have lost benefits such as supplemental health insurance and pension plans. They might have found new jobs, but they simply do not have the same benefits as the old ones.

However, the bills keep coming in. The mortgage still needs to be paid, and these people have taken on more debt to make ends meet. Some Canadians are approaching retirement with adult children who have not quite left the nest, because they cannot afford to. Their children may have college or university educations, sometimes both, but they cannot catch a break. They cannot get jobs that enable them to sustain themselves economically.

Young Canadians have been excluded from the recent economic recovery. There are 262,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the downturn. Many middle-class families have taken on extra debt just to financially support their adult children who are living at home. Some parents take on more debt to help children go back to school. It is also to help them with rent, or in other cases, to renovate the basement or pay for extra groceries until these young people can get a good start.

These Canadians do not know how they are going to pay the bills today. In many cases, middle-class parents, and in some cases grandparents, have delayed their retirement saving and have taken on more debt. They are struggling to get by today, when interest rates are low, and are petrified of what will happen in the future as rates inevitably rise.

These Canadians need a break. They need a government with a vision and a plan to create jobs, growth, and prosperity, but the finance minister was not thinking of them when he wrote this budget. He failed to provide Canadians with the plan they need. Instead of creating jobs, growth, and prosperity, the latest Conservative budget includes no new jobs, low economic growth, and more debt for Canadians than prosperity.

●(1625)

Canada's job market completely stalled in 2013. Only 5,300 net new full-time jobs were created last year for the entire country. A whopping 95% of last year's net new jobs were part-time. As I mentioned before, young Canadians still have 262,000 fewer jobs compared to before the downturn. It is clear that the government needs to change course and provide a credible plan to stimulate job creation. The status quo is not working.

Instead of introducing a new plan to create jobs, the budget would actually cut provincial programs that today are helping Canadians find work. Instead of working together with the provinces, the Conservatives have decided to go full steam ahead, to go it alone, on the Canada job grant, damn the torpedoes. To pay for it, they are actually taking money from the provinces, money that is currently being used to deliver skills training to some of our most vulnerable citizens, some of the Canadians who need the help the most.

This decision, for instance, endangers programs like BladeRunners, a program in B.C. that the OECD has called "one of the most successful programmes in Canada to support transition to employment of disadvantaged youth". That program was funded through the labour market agreements that would be dismantled under this budget.

In my own riding of Kings—Hants, groups like the Valley Community Learning Association receive critical funding through the labour market agreements. This association has helped 91 Nova Scotians get their GED since it started receiving funding from the labour market agreements in 2010. It is giving those people a chance to get an education and to further themselves and their families. It helps apprentices with their math so they can pass the academic portion of their programs. It helps people prepare for aptitude tests so they can get through the screening processes in the military or for work at the local Michelin plant.

There are many vital groups in my riding that rely on labour market agreement funding to help vulnerable Nova Scotians. I am talking of groups like Community INC, PeopleWorx, Hants County Community Access Network, and the Valley African Nova Scotian Development Association.

Vulnerable Canadians who are out of work rely on these programs to find jobs, and these vulnerable Canadians will be hurt by the budget. Once again, last night the Minister of Finance was unaware of who he is hurting with his callous budget that is so out of touch with these Canadians who are struggling.

The Budget

On the jobs front for young Canadians, the budget announced \$70 million for youth internships, but that is the same money that was announced in last year's budget. This is a déjà vu budget. It is a *Groundhog Day* budget. It does not actually do anything to really address youth unemployment and youth underemployment. The minister has not been thinking of our youth who need a government that does more. Instead, this is just another area of the budget where the Conservatives have been cleverly deceptive. When it comes to growth, the budget actually downgrades the Conservatives' own expectations for the Canadian economy established in the fall economic statement.

In the lead-up to the budget, we knew that the Prime Minister already had the worst record on economic growth of any Canadian prime minister since R.B. Bennett in the depths of the Depression. Canada's economy is actually growing more slowly today than the economies of the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and 11 other industrialized countries. Next year, Canada's growth is projected to fall below the OECD average.

The IMF has said that Canada's growth is at risk due to "high household debt and house prices". The fact is that the finance minister's reckless introduction of 40-year, zero-down-payment mortgages in 2006 helped fuel a Canadian housing and personal debt problem that continues to endanger our economy.

The only thing that seems to be growing in Canada's economy these days is household debt. In 2013, Canada's household debt hit a record high. The average Canadian household now owes \$1.66 for every dollar of disposable income.

● (1630)

In terms of the fiscal debt, the federal debt of the country, the Conservatives will have added \$161 billion to the federal debt before the next election. That is according to their own numbers.

Canadians know that debt equals future taxes, because we will have to pay down that debt at some point in the future. An extra \$161 billion in debt means that the average Canadian family will have to pay over \$18,000 more in future taxes to pay off the debt racked up by the Conservative government, and that is not counting the interest.

With all of this debt, too many Canadians may have to delay their retirement plans. They are putting off saving for tomorrow because they can hardly make ends meet today. However, everyone has to stop working at some point; we cannot put off the cost of retirement indefinitely. The government does not seem to get it.

That is why the premiers are proposing a way to strengthen the CPP, to make sure that Canadians are better prepared for retirement. However, when the provinces proposed increasing the CPP, the Minister of Finance shut them down. He called it a job-killing payroll tax. What hypocrisy because this is the same Minister of Finance who is keeping EI payroll taxes artificially high.

According to this budget, the EI account is set to balance in 2015, yet the minister intends to collect an extra \$5.2 billion in surplus EI revenues next year and use that to pad his books to create a surplus before the election. The minister could lower EI premiums. That would give Canadians business and workers a much needed break.

Instead, he is keeping these EI rates artificially high. He is charging Canadians billions in extra EI premiums to pad his books.

The logic of the minister goes like this. When the provinces proposed an expanded CPP, it is a job-killing payroll tax. However, when the Conservatives keep EI premiums artificially high in order to create a phony surplus on the eve of an election, it is fair game.

The Conservatives are not just relying on bloated EI taxes to pad their books and create a phony surplus, but are also using one-time asset sales. Ontarians have seen this show before from the minister. During the Harris government, the same Minister of Finance in his previous position orchestrated the failed Highway 407 asset sale to pad his books and cover up his deficit. The minister held a fire sale and sold the highway to Spain at billions of dollars below market value. In Ontario, the same minister left Ontarians with a \$6 billion deficit when he had promised a surplus. Today, here in Ottawa, the minister is again creating a phony surplus on the eve of an election for his political gains and misleading Canadians.

This budget would hurt too many Canadians. It punishes veterans, ignores the struggling middle class and struggling Canadian youth. It creates a phony surplus on the eve of an election, built on artificially high EI premiums, defence cuts, and asset sales; and it tries to balance the books on the backs of the most vulnerable Canadians, including aging veterans and marginalized Canadians who rely on provincial training programs to get themselves ready for the job market.

For this reason, the Liberal Party stands opposed to this budget. Therefore, I move the following:

That the amendment be amended by deleting all the words after the word "services"; and substituting the following:

g) Slashes billions of dollars from the health care plans of veterans, RCMP officers and of other Canadian public service retirees.

h) fails to offer a real plan for long term economic growth that would help middle class families;

i) takes money from workers and employers by keeping Employment Insurance premiums artificially high;

j) fails to revoke the Budget 2013 tariff hikes that increased the cost on everything from wigs for cancer patients to tricycles; and

k) fails to fill the \$3 billion infrastructure hole that Budget 2013 created in the Building Canada Fund.

The Budget

• (1635)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who sits on the finance committee with me. I agree with his analysis that this is a do-nothing budget, but a budget that actually hurts people. Certainly, in this do-nothing budget, there is nothing for housing, for transit, nothing to help young people get a toehold in the job market, and nothing to help families with affordability. However, he made some points about how the government goes further and actually hurts people. He talked about veterans and others who are negatively affected.

The NDP approach to the budget has been that the Conservatives are playing politics and ignoring the real needs of Canadians. They are playing politics because it is a do-nothing budget until next year, when they can roll out some goodies right before an election. More than that, it seems that in the budget the government is playing politics by going after environmentalists, unions, and environmental groups. Could the member give me his view of whether the government is targeting or scapegoating certain groups for political benefit?

• (1640)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the government does have a real history of attacking any person or organization that has the audacity or honesty to speak truth to power. They have gone from attacking the scientific community, both within government and independent scientific advisory groups within Canada, including the environmental community, which has been demonized, marginalized, and stigmatized by the Conservative government, to people within the public service, long-standing public servants, like Munir Sheikh as an example, or Arthur Carty, people who have a long record of contributing positively to public policy development.

Therefore, this budget continues this attack on independent thinking. We are seeing it now with the Conservatives' latest legislation on Elections Canada. The government has a problem with groups that actually tell it the straight goods and have the audacity to disagree with it.

We in the Liberal Party believe in evidence-based decision-making, not decision-based evidence-making, which is the approach the Conservatives are taking.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, outlined some of the barriers to competition. He said:

Canada is struggling to stay competitive. In fact, our country's ability to remain a leader among nations is stagnating. For the second consecutive year, the World Economic Forum ranked Canada 14th in global economic competitiveness—down two places from 2011 and sliding five places since 2009. Restoring Canada's competitiveness requires an ambitious, aggressive and innovative private sector. Strategic thinking and smart public policies are also needed to address long-standing structural impediments that hinder businesses at a time when they need much greater flexibility to compete.

He goes on to say that urgent action is needed and that every Canadian's standard of living depends on the government meeting the challenge.

Was there anything in this budget that deals with the concerns raised by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce? Was there anything in this budget that would deal with the growth problem this country really has?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Beatty also cited in his report the job skills mismatch in Canada. It is the situation where we have people without jobs and jobs without people.

In budget 2013, the centrepiece was the Canada jobs grant, which indicates that the Conservatives recognized there was at least a problem. However, the fact that it is also the centrepiece of budget 2014 and that over the last year there has still not been program, the fact all we have is a multi-million dollar bill for the advertising of a non-existent program, speaks to the economic incompetence of the Conservatives on this very significant file, the job skills mismatch, which is limiting growth, job creation, prosperity, and competitiveness for Canadians.

This is a case where the government's failure to build strong relationships with the provincial governments, to work with them and actually meet with them on an ongoing basis, has a significant economic cost to our country.

• (1645)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's leader often refers to the importance of investing in our middle class. One of the great initiatives of this budget is in fact that very thing, an investment in the training of apprentices.

I would like my colleague to listen to this quote from Canada's Building Trades Unions:

After years of being a mere add-on to post-secondary education, apprenticeship is being noticed by our Federal Government...the way apprentices are being treated has changed and they are now, thanks to measures introduced in the this 2014 Budget, treated more like their colleagues in college and university training.

Will my colleague support this investment in training of apprentices or does he agree with his leader that budgets balance themselves?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, my leader was very clear in that he believes that economic growth helps governments balance the books. I think he is absolutely right. I think most economists would agree with that. I wish the Conservatives would get that memo: growth is actually good for balancing the books and we need to create growth to help families move forward.

In answer to the question, I do agree with the member that apprenticeship programs and support for apprentices is tremendously important. In Canada, we need to restore the honour paid to skilled trades. We can look at what some other countries are doing. For instance, Germany has done a much better job of maintaining and fostering respect for skilled trades. Of course, support for apprenticeship programs is something we would like to see more of.

However, when the member began to speak about the benefits for middle-class families, I thought he was going to raise the issue of income splitting, because that is where we expected more discussion from the government.

The Budget

We did hear from the Minister of Finance earlier today that he disagrees with that Conservative platform plank, but we also heard from the Minister of Employment and Social Development that he still agrees with that Conservative platform plank. We heard the Prime Minister earlier today agree with both of the ministers on that. So, we are trying to understand where the Conservatives are going in terms of tax support for middle-class families.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who serves with me on the Standing Committee on Finance.

We have been talking a great deal about the Canada job grant. I will talk about it some more in my speech.

Aside from the program itself, there is still the issue of jurisdiction. The federal government has clearly not done its job. It has not tried to bring the provinces together over a program to which they can all contribute. As we have seen over the past two years, the Conservatives have done this with other programs, not just this one.

For instance, the budget refers to the immigrant investor program. Its value is debatable. However, the program falls under shared jurisdictions. Quebec uses the funding for venture capital, among others. However, it seems that without consultation the federal government decided to eliminate the program and create a new one.

The federal government is also moving forward with the national securities commission without consulting the provinces, despite the Supreme Court ruling on the matter.

Could the hon. member for Kings—Hants comment on the way the Conservative government operates as it casts the provinces aside and tries to impose its vision?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, we must absolutely work with provincial governments on important economic and social issues. Of course, we must also respect provincial jurisdictions.

The Conservative government refuses to meet with provincial governments and to work with them on issues that are important to our country. The Conservative government obviously does not respect provincial jurisdictions. It is rather strange to see a Conservative government take this approach.

The Prime Minister gave a speech in Quebec City during the 2006 election campaign. He said that he would work with the provincial governments and would always respect provincial jurisdictions. That is utter nonsense, since the government and the Prime Minister do not respect provincial jurisdictions.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

I am delighted to speak today in support of economic action plan 2014.

Yesterday I was honoured to sit in this House as the Minister of Finance tabled his 10th budget. This budget confirms our government is on track to have a balanced budget by 2015 while

creating more jobs for Canadians. I am proud to highlight some of the key elements of the budget.

Our government is clearly on track to balance the budget while keeping taxes low and protecting the programs and services that Canadians count on. As the opening words in the budget document, “The Road to Balance: Creating Jobs and Opportunities”, says, Canada's economic action plan is working.

The deficit is expected to decline to \$2.9 billion in 2014-15, followed by a surplus of \$6.4 billion in 2015-16, after taking into account \$3 billion in annual adjustment for risk.

Since our government implemented Canada's economic action plan during the global recession, Canada has achieved the best job creation record of any of the G7 countries. It has the strongest income growth. As well, it has one of the best economic performances in the G7.

The Canadian economy has continued to create jobs with over one million more Canadians working today than during the worst of the recession. Canadian families in all income groups have seen increases of about 10% or more in their real, after-tax, after-transfer income since 2006.

Canadians at all income levels are benefiting from tax relief introduced by our government with low- and middle-income Canadians receiving proportionately greater relief. An average Canadian family of four now pays approximately \$3,400 less in taxes than in 2006 due to the government's record of tax relief.

Canada is now one of only a handful of countries in the world that continues to earn a AAA credit rating with a stable outlook from all the major credit-rating agencies.

Economic action plan 2014 builds on this record of achievement with positive measures to grow the economy and to help create jobs.

Yesterday afternoon, after the finance minister tabled the budget, I was shocked by the first comment and characterization by the finance critic of the NDP, who said that there was absolutely nothing for young people or for jobs in this budget. I will just take a look at what exactly economic action plan 2014 will do with regard to jobs and growth.

It will implement the Canada job grant and job-matching service to help Canadians with available jobs. It will introduce, and this is no small matter, the new Canada apprentice loan to help registered apprentices in red seal trades with the costs of training.

The Budget

Our government will invest to reform the on-reserve education system in partnership with first nations through the first nations control of first nations education act. An improvement of education on reserves and off will certainly improve and set up the graduates of secondary and post-secondary education programs, better suiting them for positions in a job market which is looking for appropriately trained graduates.

Economic action plan 2014 will invest in programs to help older workers and persons with disabilities across the labour market. It will create thousands of new paid internships for young Canadians entering the job market. It will make a major investment of \$500 million in automotive sector support, investments in Canada's forestry and mining sectors, and so much more.

It will also provide \$1.5 billion over the next decade for the Canada first research excellence fund for post-secondary education.

• (1655)

To support families and to support communities, this budget will stand up for consumers by encouraging competition and lower prices in the telecommunications market and introducing legislation to prohibit cross-border price discrimination. Certainly, this is front of mind for all Canadians living in proximity to our border.

Economic action plan 2014 will eliminate the practice of pay-to-pay billing. It will increase the adoption expense tax credit to help make adoption more affordable for Canadian families. It will expand tax relief for health care by exempting acupuncturists and naturopathic doctors' professional services from GST and HST. It will also strengthen food safety for Canadian families, with major new investments of \$390 million. It will invest more than \$300 million to bring faster broadband Internet to rural and northern Canada.

It will protect Canadians from the impact of natural disasters, with \$200 million to establish a natural disaster mitigation program. It would create a new search and rescue volunteer tax credit to recognize the important role played by search and rescue volunteers who put themselves at risk while contributing to the safety and security of Canadians.

As we have already discussed several times in the House, it will expand the funeral and burial program so that modern-day veterans have access to dignified funerals and burials.

If I could reflect for just a moment on the benefits of economic action plan 2014 with regard to protection of our great natural places and spaces, it will provide funding for the sustainability of Canada's national parks, and the infrastructure, which has been neglected over the decades, in and around the national parks. It will double the funding for the recreational fisheries conservation partnership program, a program which has enjoyed resounding success and effectiveness in the first year of its application from budget 2013. It will also provide a way for Canadians with ecologically sensitive land to protect natural areas for future generations. It would expand tax support for green energy generation.

With regard to balancing the budget, unlike the Liberals who slashed health and social transfers to the provinces, economic action plan 2014 will advance our government's commitment to control direct program spending with proposals to ensure that overall public

service employee compensation is reasonable and at the same time affordable. The government will work with crown corporations to implement fifty-fifty employee pension plan cost sharing, and to increase the retirement age for new hires.

Along with economic action plan 2014, our government issued a very important document yesterday, "Jobs Report: The State of the Canadian Labour Market", which examines recent developments in the labour market. There are challenges, again, coming out of the recession. "Jobs Report" is an important document for everyone in the House and beyond to consider and digest. There are very relevant charts, graphs and information which will affect the way our country continues on a steady course out of the economic downturn. It also outlines actions that our government has taken to support Canadians in upgrading their skills and in the creation of high-quality jobs.

In closing, I would invite my hon. colleagues on the opposite side of the House to abandon partisan criticism and partisan politics and to support economic action plan 2014.

• (1700)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague on behalf of the people that we both represent in the city of Toronto, how he can stand in this place and talk about all of the wonderful things this budget would do when some of the most crying needs in our city are clearly ignored by the Conservative government and by this budget.

Specifically, I am talking about infrastructure needs. Our city is grinding to a gridlocked halt, and we do not see the federal government stepping up and doing its full share investing in infrastructure spending. Not only do we have transit needs, but we also have needs with respect to water, sewage, roads and bridges. The need is great. He just has to speak with the Board of Trade.

This is not to mention the fact that there is nothing for housing, and that so many young people are being abandoned by this budget. They cannot get a toehold in the job market.

How can the member support this budget when he is abandoning his own city?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for a question that partially addresses the reality of challenges facing Canada's metropolis—Toronto, the GTA—and other Canadian urban centres across the country.

The Budget

However, I would disagree. Since 2006, but particularly in the depths of the global recession, we invested mightily in infrastructure that needed to be addressed over a much longer term but in the short term was addressed and continues to be addressed. Also, we have assurances from the minister and from the Prime Minister that as we achieve our objective of eliminating the deficit next year and move back into surplus, in fact we will be working with the municipalities, large and small, to address these infrastructure challenges.

However, I would just very briefly offer a couple compliments. For example, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities stated:

Rural businesses, communities and residents need sufficient bandwidth to participate in the economy...[the] announcement is good news for Canadians....

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce stated:

The government has acted.... The result will be a stronger economy and more jobs.

The Canadian Council of Chief Executives said:

Balancing the federal budget and maintaining discipline to pay down the debt are not only the right things to do, they are essential for Canada's global competitiveness.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the member's attention to two statistics. One is 1.9%, which represents the percentage drop in productivity from 2006 to September 2013. The other statistic is that we have had at least 24 consecutive months of merchandise trade deficits.

Would the hon. member not agree that this shows some kind of failure in the Conservatives' industrial policy or economic policies? I would like to know from the member what he believes these numbers tell us about where the future lies economically in Canada.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, productivity is a challenge, and that is why previous budgets and this budget address the assistance to our manufacturing sector to invest in technology, in equipment that will increase productivity. A great deal of our foreign trade balance has less to do with the steadily recovering Canadian economy than the inability of some of our traditional markets to buy our goods and our products.

However, again I would look to the Retail Council of Canada, which said, "All in all, this is a very good budget for Canadian retailers". The Association of Canadian Community Colleges said:

...this is an encouraging budget that helps support measures to address the gap in skills affecting so many sectors of the economy. The budget also recognizes the important role played by colleges and institutes in Canada's innovation system....

Again, it is an investment that will speak to future improvements in Canadian productivity.

• (1705)

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Wascana is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I do not mean to delay the debate here at all, but just for my own edification would the Chair confirm that we are now at the point in the debate of considering the subamendment proposed by the member for Kings—Hants?

The Deputy Speaker: That is correct. The subamendment has been filed and accepted by the Chair.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise not only to express my support for economic action plan 2014 but also to express thanks on behalf of the citizens of Kitchener—Conestoga to the Minister of Finance for his great work stewarding Canada through some of the toughest times the world has faced since the Great Depression.

I rise today not only to praise the road to balance he authored but also to share with my friends across the Waterloo region the very real difference budget 2014 offers to their lives.

I rise not only to talk about the creation of jobs and opportunities for Canadian families put forward in budget 2014 but also to highlight the opportunities it will create for the communities in which we live.

In order to put all of that in context, though, I need to quickly outline what we have done already and what roads we chose not to walk. A noted Canadian once asked, "Do you think it is easy to make priorities?" Apparently it is not. The previous prime minister seemed to make new priorities every day. I do not think Canadians judge politicians on the volume of their priorities, though. I think we are judged on the content of our priorities and the diligence with which we address them.

This government's long-term priorities were identified in advantage Canada. This document was authored in 2006, and it remains the best lens with which I evaluate our diligence and our ability to focus on priorities. These priorities were a tax advantage, reducing taxes for all Canadians and establishing the lowest tax rate on new business investment in the G7; a fiscal advantage, eliminating our net government debt within a generation; an entrepreneurial advantage, reducing unnecessary regulation and red tape and increasing competition in the Canadian marketplace; a knowledge advantage, creating the best-educated, most skilled, and most flexible workforce in the world; and an infrastructure advantage, building the modern infrastructure we need to compete abroad and enjoy livable communities at home.

Through the intervening years, advantage Canada has served us well. Through the good times and the worst times, our priorities have remained unchanged. Our focus on them continues. When I say the worst times, I am of course referring to the worst global economic downturn since the Great Depression. By sticking to the priorities outlined in advantage Canada, Canada not only led the world in economic growth but will now benefit from the strategic investments we made.

In my home of Waterloo region, we saw Conestoga College grow its capacity to train much-needed engineers, health care workers, and food processing technicians. We opened the Institute for Quantum Computing, the Canadian Digital Media Network, and the Commu-nitech Hub to support the entrepreneurs who create tomorrow's jobs.

The Budget

We enjoy new community centres, safer drinking water, and improved park lands, thanks to the federal government investments. With the strong partnership of this government, Waterloo region has become a better place to live, work, and raise a family. All of this came without raising taxes and without cutting our support for health care or education, as the previous government did. All of this positive action occurred during the worst economic times most living Canadians have experienced.

As chair of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, I am pleased to see the key investments this Prime Minister and this government have made. Well over \$17 billion have been invested in clean transportation initiatives, renewable fuels, clean energy, clean air, green infrastructure, research, energy efficiency, and work to preserve our oceans and lakes.

Economic action plan 2014 builds on this legacy by expanding tax relief for green energy generation, investing in Canada's national parks, and further supporting conservation efforts and family-oriented conservation activities, and by making it easier and more affordable to donate ecologically sensitive lands for preservation. All of this was done while outperforming every other G7 country in job creation, while maintaining the lowest debt to GDP ratio in the G7, and while Canadians are experiencing the strongest real per capita income growth in the G7.

Here we are debating budget 2014, the road to balance, the latest phase of Canada's economic action plan. While our neighbours to the south are tied up in debates about how much they are willing to increase their national debt, here in Canada we are coming to appreciate the fact that, thanks to the leadership of this Minister of Finance and this Prime Minister, Canada will soon enter a great national debate about how to allocate a surplus.

• (1710)

On behalf of the fine people of Kitchener—Conestoga, I thank the finance minister for all his work. I thank him for bringing us to this point where we are seeing the benefits of all these investments and where the end to deficit spending is in sight.

When the budget is balanced, a lower portion of tax dollars will be needed to pay interest on our debt. This signals our stability to the world and helps attract investment to Canada.

Most importantly though, ending deficit spending will lower the debt with which we burden our children and our grandchildren.

Speaking of our children, I would like to draw to the attention of the House a report authored by CIVIX, the student budget consultation. CIVIX consulted with students across Canada on their budget priorities. To a question about the most important step the government could take to help families, the answer was not to increase subsidies for post-secondary education, as we might have expected.

No, in fact, the most popular answer provided by students was to lower personal income taxes. When asked whether they agreed with the statement that the government should place a high priority on reducing the debt as much as possible, over 80% of Canadian students were onside. When asked what the priority should be for allocating the surplus, 46% of them said we need to pay down the

debt versus a measly 9% who called for an increase in spending to boost jobs.

What does it mean when Canadian secondary school students have a better grasp of basic economics than the opposition parties? I think it means our future is in good hands. Even they know that budgets do not balance themselves. This road to balance ensures the future that these students will inherit will be a bright future.

Students pursuing a trade will, for the first time, have access to federal student aid. Youth looking for work will enjoy increased support for paid internships. Recent graduates and those in the workforce will find starting their own business much easier, thanks to the 800,000 payroll remittances or red tape that we have eliminated on small business.

For my home of Waterloo region I can be even more specific. The Canadian Digital Media Network and the Institute for Quantum Computing both receive support in budget 2014. CDMN will help entrepreneurs find commercial uses for what the industry calls “big data”. IQC will continue its work to develop the world's first quantum computer.

It is worth noting that even though the quantum computer has yet to be developed, IQC is already an active commercializer of knowledge. To do its research, it needed to invent the required specialized tools. These tools are now being sold around the world.

Our initial investment in the Communtech Hub has exceeded every expectation, and this road to balance supports the creation of similar success stories by increasing funds for the Canada accelerator and incubator program.

I know the opposition will disagree with me on this, but frankly, I was most happy yesterday to hear that this government remains committed to the Canada job grant. Virtually every employer I have spoken to over the last year sees our current system of training as broken. Polytechnics Canada sees the current system as broken, too focused on filling seats and not enough on real results; and it is right. We can take the easy road, as has the Wynne government, and defend a failed system, or we can try to do better. I am glad we are not giving up on doing better for Canadians.

I read in the media that some politicians in my home province of Ontario are upset that they will receive less money this year in equalization funding. An improving economy means there is less need for equalization in Ontario than there was last year. To anyone other than the Wynne government, this should be a good thing. An improving economy is something Ontarians should celebrate rather than mourn. It brings cheerleading for the recession to a new, indisputably lower level.

The Budget

If Ontarians truly want to continue receiving equalization funding due to poor economic performance, all they need to do is re-elect a Liberal government in Ontario, and I know they are better than that.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He appears to support the budget, so he must understand the whole thing. I would like to draw on his knowledge of the immigrant investor program, which this budget would abolish. Does he know what kind of effect that would have in Quebec?

Quebec relies heavily on the immigrant investor program. Will Quebec still be able to invite as many foreign investors and under the existing criteria?

If not, did the Conservatives consult Quebec before making this decision? A number of stakeholders in Quebec are very worried about this measure and are not quite sure what kind of effect it will have.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I indicated in an earlier answer to one of my colleagues that I have not had time to read the entire 400 pages of this book, so I cannot speak with authority on that particular program.

However, I can say that our finance minister, the Minister of State for Finance, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance extended their consultations across this country in a great way to get input from all sectors. I do know that the average Canadian family today is \$3,400 better off than when we came to office, and I know that every single resident of Quebec will benefit from that.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, knowing the hon. member as well as I do, being a member from Ontario, there was nothing in the budget when it came to helping the cities that are currently struggling with infrastructure needs. One of the specific issues is the damage from the ice storm, and I suspect there was a fair amount of damage sustained in southern Ontario. I certainly know that Toronto, Richmond Hill, and Thornhill suffered a tremendous amount of damage as a result of the ice storm. There is no reference to helping Toronto and southern Ontario with that issue at all in this budget. There is very little, other than bridges and small harbours, when it comes to infrastructure.

The second issue is the continued talk about a surplus, which is going to be made up of inflated EI premiums, which would make up \$5.2 million of the so-called surplus. Is he not concerned that all of what is being talked about is phony money that may never materialize, that it would be great if that promise is kept, but it is based on phony money and phony surpluses?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, to respond on the issue of the ice storm, our hearts go out to every Canadian who suffered through that, many without heat or electricity for hours and hours or, in some cases, days. I know in my community there were many who did suffer.

There is no government in history that has given more support to the municipalities than this government. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has applauded our budget, and the primary reason the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is supportive of our government's action is the gas tax funding and GST funding it gets is a predictable, long-term investment that it can count on from year to year. We have doubled it, we have legislated it, and now we have indexed it for inflation. Therefore, our municipalities are in better shape in their ability to forecast projects they want to carry out in the upcoming construction year.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just admitted that he did not read the entire budget, so I will ask him a question on one part that he appears to have read, namely the part on science and technology.

The member talked a lot about this government's investments in science and technology, but what the budget fails to mention is that the government plans to slash \$2.6 billion in funding for science within all departments between 2013 and 2016.

Furthermore, in this budget, the government is investing in science geared towards industry, but there is absolutely no investment in science for the common good, for instance, for the environment or for Canadians' health.

Why does this government completely disrespect its own scientists?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, our government certainly has invested a lot in environmental protection and in research that actually benefits Canadians.

For example, when I go to Conestoga College in my riding, employers come to talk to me. They tell me that because they can partner with Conestoga College in finding solutions to real problems that their industries have been facing for years is a big bonus to them in getting products to market and improving the quality of life for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP) Mr. Speaker, if indeed I have eight minutes before I am interrupted, I will talk about the current economic situation, with a view to putting yesterday's budget into context.

To hear the Conservatives crow about the budget and the current situation, you would think that the recession is a thing of the past, that Canadians are working again and that the current situation is as good as it was before the recession. However, that is not the case.

In May 2008, before the recession hit the country, the unemployment rate in Canada was 6.1% while the labour force rate was 68%. Those figures are much more positive than today's. According to the most recent data available, the unemployment rate in January was 7.0%, almost 1% higher than it was before the recession. The labour force was down, at 66.8%.

The Budget

That means that far fewer people are in the labour market. This is a major problem. Specifically, we are talking about 1.4 million unemployed Canadians, or 300,000 more than before the recession. No, the government should not be acting as if the recession were over and as if a balanced budget must be achieved in 2015 at all costs.

We will say it over and over again: achieving a balanced budget is important, but it must be done according to the economic cycle. The economic data clearly show that we have not come to the end of an economic cycle. The government should still be taking steps to stimulate job creation and economic growth.

In this budget, which the Conservatives themselves have called a "do nothing budget", there are absolutely no measures along those lines. In upcoming speeches, we will hear them talk about measures that come out of this budget of almost 500 pages, so that they can feel better about themselves.

However, when you draft a budget, you have to make choices. The fiscal situation in Canada is important and the Conservatives' drive to achieve a balanced budget in 2015 is clearly a vote-getting goal. The Conservatives themselves are not even trying to hide that anymore. That poses serious problems for job creation and economic growth.

The Conservatives boast that Canada is leading the G7 in terms of job creation and economic growth. I have a little bit of news for them: Canada now ranks third among G7 countries and is continuing to slide below the other countries.

Within the OECD, that is, among industrialized nations, Canada is in the middle of the pack. Over a year and a half ago, the OECD predicted that Canada's slide would continue, so no, Canada is not really in such a great position and is still feeling the effects of the recession.

Drafting a budget means making choices. The Conservatives do not really understand the true cost of their cuts, of what many people call their austerity measures. Even though things are not as bad as they are in Europe, this is still austerity because the government is cutting its investments.

This is the fourth round of austerity measures, the fourth budget before the government starts handing out goodies for the election next year in an attempt to bribe Canadians.

Clearly, there is a price to pay for achieving an artificially balanced budget at all costs in 2015 rather than 2016 or 2017. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, because of all the cuts, the Conservative government's past four austerity budgets have undermined our economic growth potential.

Current economic growth, as represented by our GDP, is 1.6% lower than it would have been without the cuts. That means tens of billions of dollars in lost earnings for our economy. I know that the government does not hold the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in high regard.

● (1725)

Perhaps they would be more inclined to believe the International Monetary Fund which, in its January report, indicated that federal

government cuts will dampen economic growth by at least 10% to 15%. I will repeat this for the government: Canadian economic growth would be 10% to 15% higher without these cuts and austerity measures.

I was very surprised, taken aback in fact, by what the Minister of Finance said when presenting his budget yesterday. It is worthwhile quoting him:

...our government remains committed to balancing the budget in 2015, but I must be clear. We did not do this on the backs of ordinary Canadians or Canadians in need....

I was elected in 2011 and, since then, I have been fighting against the Conservatives' cuts, which have a real impact on the everyday lives of the people in my riding in eastern Quebec. Whether we are talking about employment insurance, VIA Rail, Canada Post, Service Canada, veterans, science and technology or food inspection, to name just a few on a potentially long list, the Conservative government has made cuts to essential services. It claims to be cutting the fat when it is now cutting to the bone.

Front-line services for Canadians and Quebecers have decreased because of the Conservatives' measures. That has an impact on economic growth and job creation, which they have not been able to sustain and which no longer seem to be priorities in this budget.

I know that my time is up. I will come back tomorrow to continue my speech, and I will talk about the measures in this budget, which, instead of promoting economic growth, will further hinder this growth.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have 13 minutes to finish his speech.

* * *

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES DEVOLUTION ACT

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of Bill C-15, An Act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement and to repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, other Acts and certain orders and regulations, as reported (with amendment) from committee, and of Motions Nos. 4 and 5.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motions at report stage of Bill C-15.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 4. The vote on this motion also applies to Motion No. 5.

● (1810)

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

(Division No. 58)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Footé	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Jones	Julian
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Péclét
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriote— 130

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman

The Budget

Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockett
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lobb
Lukivski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seebach
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 150

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 4 defeated. I also declare Motion No. 5 defeated.

The next question is on the main motion.

The Budget

● (1820)

[English]

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

(Division No. 59)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Ashfield	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bateman	Bélanger
Bellavance	Benoit
Benskin	Bergen
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brosseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Byrne	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Clement
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crockatt
Cullen	Cuzner
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseauit
Dykstra	Eastar
Eyking	Falk
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Footé	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Galipeau	Gallant
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Gill
Godin	Goguen
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Groguhé	Harper
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	James
Jones	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)

Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Lake	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Lauzon
Laverdière	Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leslie	Leung
Liu	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Maguire
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	Menegakis
Merrifield	Michaud
Miller	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	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nicholson	Norlock
Nunez-Melo	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Pacetti
Papillon	Paradis
Payne	Pélet
Perreault	Pilon
Poillievre	Preston
Quach	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Rankin	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Seeback
Sellah	Sgro
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffler	Storseth
Strahl	Sullivan
Sweet	Thibeault
Tilson	Toet
Toone	Tremblay
Trost	Trotter
Trudeau	Truppe
Turnel	Uppal
Valcourt	Valeriotte
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Williamson
Weston (Saint John)	Woodworth
Wilke	Young (Vancouver South)
Wong	
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer — 279	

NAYS

Members

May — 2

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division of Motion No. 430, under private members' business.

● (1825)

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

(Division No. 60)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Ashfield	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bateman	Bélangier
Bellavance	Benoit
Benskin	Bergen
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Bloch	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brosseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Byrne	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Clement
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crockatt
Cullen	Cuzner
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dreeshen	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Foote
Fortin	Freeland
Freeman	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Gill	Godin
Goguen	Goldring

Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Gravelle
Grewal	Groguhé
Harper	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	James
Jones	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Lake	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Lauzon
Laverdière	Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leslie	Leung
Liu	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Maguire
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Michaud	Miller
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
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nicholson
Norlock	Nunez-Melo
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Pacetti	Papillon
Paradis	Payne
Pécelet	Perreault
Pilon	Poilievre
Preston	Quach
Rafferty	Raitt
Rajotte	Rankin
Rathgeber	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Scott
Seeback	Sellah
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sullivan	Sweet
Thibeault	Tilson
Toet	Toone
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Trudeau
Truppe	Turmel
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriotte	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)

Private Members' Business

Young (Vancouver South) Zimmer— 282

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

MANDATORY DISCLOSURE OF DRUG SHORTAGES ACT

The House resumed from February 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-523, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act (disclosure of drug shortages), 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-523 under private members' business.

• (1835)

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

(Division No. 61)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Jones	Julian
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)

Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Pécllet	Perreault
Pilon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriote— 128

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Ashfield	Aspin
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton

Private Members' Business

Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Williamson	Wilks
Woodworth	Wong
Young (Vancouver South)	Young (Oakville)
	Zimmer — 152

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SUPPORTING NON-PARTISAN AGENTS OF PARLIAMENT ACT

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-520, An Act supporting non-partisan agents of Parliament, be now read a 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 of Bill C-520, under private members' business.

• (1845)

[*English*]

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

(Division No. 62)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Ashfield	Aspin
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde

Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Lake	Lauson
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Poilievre
Preston	Raït
Rajotte	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Williamson
Weston (Saint John)	Woodworth
Wilks	Young (Vancouver South)
Wong	
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer — 151	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (St. John's East)

Private Members' Business

Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Jones	Julian
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Rathgeber	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriote — 129	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: It being 6:45 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

AFGHAN VETERANS MONUMENT

The House resumed from November 19, 2013 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When the bill was last before the House, the hon. member for Winnipeg North had the floor, and he still has three minutes left to conclude his remarks.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a privilege and honour it is to stand in my place as a former member of the Canadian Forces to pay tribute to the veterans of the war in Afghanistan.

The Liberal Party of Canada fully endorses the motion.

The temporary memorial was established in the Hall of Honour on Parliament Hill. We saw tributes there, and many people living here in Ottawa and elsewhere observed that memorial. I understand that it is on tour across Canada, where it is making many different stops. I also understand that it will be stopping once in the United States, because we recognize the fact that American soldiers were part of the Canadian command, if I can put it that way.

It is important to recognize that more than 158 regular force and reserve force members were lost. They made the supreme sacrifice in Afghanistan. More than 1,500 soldiers came back to Canada changed quite dramatically, whether it was because of a physical injury or a mental issue. We need to pay tribute to those who represented Canada's interests when they fought for basic freedoms and the rule of law. They went there on our behalf.

The Liberal Party of Canada supports having a permanent memorial. Canadians have been in Afghanistan since 2002. Thousands of Canadian Forces members have done their duty by serving our great nation. Canadians from coast to coast to coast feel very proud of the service they provided.

With that, I rise and acknowledge that the Liberal Party wants to see a permanent memorial established. We look forward to voting on Motion No. 448. I trust that sometime within the next hour we will see the motion pass.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have eagerly awaited this opportunity to join the debate on the motion before the House, Motion No. 448, for a tribute to the Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

I, like others, congratulate the hon. member for Palliser for sponsoring this important and timely motion, and for displaying the commitment to see it through to approval and passage. It is a worthy and commendable gesture by the member, and it appropriately honours the courage of the Canadian men and women who have served in Afghanistan. Simply put, the motion speaks to the concept, the ideal, and the purpose of duty.

“Duty” is a word I plan to repeat several times in my remarks. The Afghanistan mission required some Canadians to serve not just one tour of duty, but two or three, and in some cases, even four or more tours of duty. My colleague beside me on the left served one of those tours, and during his tour, there were 24 losses of life.

These men and women did their duty. They did their duty to our country, to their service, and to their comrades and, at the same time, we understand that they did so, that they answered Canada's call at great personal sacrifice.

It meant placing themselves in harm's way every day of every month while completing a tour. It meant fighting an enemy who redefined oppression and cruelty, if not barbarity. It meant protecting innocent civilians from those who dismissed every basic principle of civilized conduct. It meant long and stressful absences from loved ones—missing birthdays, anniversaries, special holidays, and even the birth of children. It also meant standing and saluting fallen or wounded comrades.

We lost 158 members of Canada's Armed Forces during this mission. We lost 158 Canadians who exemplified every trait, value, and ideal that we admire and each of us wishes to emulate. We lost 158 of Canada's finest men and women.

We lost Master Corporal Scott Vernelli and Sergeant John Wayne Faught from my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. May they rest in peace.

Our lost heroes personified what has made this nation so great. They willingly grasped the torch passed on from previous generations of Canadian veterans and held it high with pride, courage, and distinction. They added new chapters to our proud military history.

Through a tribute to the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, we can perpetually honour and remember them. Through this tribute, we will always honour our nation's loss of 158 of her finest sons and daughters, and we will go even further. We will also honour, remember, and support those who were wounded while performing their duties.

Over 2,000 Canadians were wounded in the Afghanistan mission. Some have returned to duty, others struggle to adapt to life with their injuries. Some, unfortunately, are still trying to hide wounds that we cannot see, wounds of the mind, the heart, and the spirit. These wounds are sometimes the most difficult to heal.

I say to my fellow members that we cannot simply approve this motion and then walk away with the sense that our duty is done. Every member of this House has, in my opinion, a duty not only to honour and remember, but also to support those who served and survived, as well as those who continue to serve.

That is our duty and, as long as we place our Canadian Armed Forces personnel in harm's way, this duty can never be done. I am proud to contribute in part my duty as the son of a 36-year member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and by being a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, where we all work so very hard in support of our veterans.

The Afghanistan mission was conducted in a country halfway around the world and in a land that can be harsh and inhospitable. It was a mission that brought new terms or expressions into our daily vocabulary, such as "IED" and, tragically, "ramp ceremony". It created a unique memorial: The Highway of Heroes.

• (1850)

We were introduced to the Silver Cross Mothers, who did not display a silver hair, so young were they and the loved ones they lost.

Every conflict has similarities, but they are remembered and expressed in different and, sometimes, unique ways.

Our government continues to anticipate and meet the needs of Canada's veterans, be they borne from duties performed in conflicts that occurred decades ago or more recent ones, such as the first Gulf War, the Balkans and, indeed, Afghanistan.

Each conflict represents unique challenges that we must meet in order to support Canada's veterans and their families.

The Afghanistan mission was, and is, no exception. It has represented the most significant and sustained engagement by Canada's Armed Forces since the Korean War.

I must commend the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs, who has been tireless in his efforts to implement and build upon the innovative support programs and benefits brought about by our government.

Private Members' Business

Other members have spoken in detail of such programs, services, and innovations. I will not take up the time of the House to repeat their observations and valuable contributions to this debate. I will simply state with honesty that this government is working incredibly hard on behalf of our veterans, and I experience proof of that, every day, through my involvement on the Standing Committee of Veterans Affairs.

I am proud to say that this government is meeting its duty to Canada's veterans. It continues to strive to provide our veterans with programs and benefits that demonstrate compassion, foresight, and efficiency in their delivery.

As an hon. member has already asked: is there room for improvement?

Of course, there is. It is the duty of the government to always improve. It is our duty to participate and provide a meaningful contribution to a process that is so vital to sustaining democracy, and we are fulfilling that duty.

In closing, I ask all members to support the motion. We will not be glorifying war. We will be honouring the readiness of our fellow Canadians to sacrifice their security, their future and, indeed, their lives in defence and promotion of the values that make Canada the envy of the world.

So, let us do our duty. Let us stand together with Canada's veterans and their families and reassure them, very clearly, that we will remember their fallen comrades and that we will always honour their devotion to duty.

• (1855)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to stand in the House today in support of Motion No. 448, for the establishment of a permanent memorial for those who served in Afghanistan. I wish to credit the member for Palliser for recommending that we memorialize not only those who gave their lives but also those who were injured and those who aided in the mission. One subtle change is that it might be more appropriate to speak of commemorating, not necessarily memorializing, as I understand the member wishes to thank all who served, not simply those who gave their lives.

I, along with my colleagues and all Canadians, am grateful to the contribution that the men and women who serve in the Canadian armed forces provide to this country. It is only right that these brave individuals be honoured. It is right that we, as Canadians, mark our gratitude.

Two members of my immediate family served in the two world wars. My father served in the air force during World War II, and my great uncle lost his life during World War I. I was raised with the tales of war and the sacrifices made. Many spoke of valour, many had sadder tales, and many of my father's generation chose simply not to talk about the war, so it left me with a very quiet understanding of the sacrifices made.

Private Members' Business

I had the honour of accompanying the former minister of national defence to the repatriation of a fallen soldier brought home to his family. The experience is one that brings home the sacrifices of war and will remain with me forever.

I am working with the forces, business members, and historic groups to re-establish the cenotaph in my own riding of Edmonton—Strathcona to enable the regiment and community to assemble for commemoration ceremonies. I know that all communities across Canada have a great respect for our armed forces. I think it is a beautiful gesture that the people in my community want to come together to remember and to help people come together. It is indeed a beautiful gesture that we will not only commemorate those who gave their lives in World War I and II but also honour those who are serving today.

The timing of this motion is significant, with the permanent withdrawal of troops after over a decade of Canadian participation in the Afghanistan conflict. The end of this mission will be a time to reflect on the contributions made by Canada to improving the lives of the Afghanistan people, the strides we had taken in contributing to training efforts, and the work accomplished alongside our NATO allies.

The proposed memorial offers at least one concrete means to thank these men, women, and their families and would serve as a reminder of the need to strengthen our resolve to support those who have returned home with special needs, for example, those with injuries, whether physical or mental, as the member spoke of earlier this evening. It would serve as a reminder that we always have to be there for our veterans in their time of need and that our responsibility is that if they risk their lives overseas, we will be here for them when they come home and we will care for the soldiers and their families.

Most importantly, it is a time to honour the 158 Canadian soldiers who lost their lives. I wish particularly to mark the contributions of the soldiers from the Edmonton garrison. The garrison is home to 5,000 military personnel and their families. CFB Edmonton began deploying soldiers at the commencement of the mission in Afghanistan, with 750 troops from the Third Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry deploying to Afghanistan in January of 2002. From then to now, CFB Edmonton has been a major contributor to Canada's involvement. Of the Canadian soldiers who lost their lives in the mission, 42, or almost one-third, were from CFB Edmonton.

This past summer, soldiers left Edmonton for Afghanistan, to serve in the final stages of the Operation Attention training mission. While the combat role of the Canadian military ended some time ago, the contribution of these soldiers continues in a dangerous setting far from family and home. Just as they are on the minds of loved ones who are missing them while they are away, our men and women in uniform must remain in the minds of Canadians after their return. A monument is a tangible way for us, as a country, to show our soldiers that their contribution will never be forgotten.

The proposal for a special monument for Canadians serving in Afghanistan is laudable. By coincidence, in Edmonton last fall I had the fortune of meeting the Canadian artist who had designed a proposed memorial to honour our Afghanistan veterans.

● (1900)

The artist asked me what had happened to the previous apparent support for the completion and dedication of this particular memorial. The Canadian monument once installed at Kandahar airfield is now touring the country. We were honoured with a view of the memorial here on the Hill just before Christmas.

I was advised that the intent is to permanently install this memorial in the capital region. It is not clear from the motion whether this is the member's intent or if he is suggesting a second form of memorial. Either way, we need to establish a permanent memorial.

I feel obliged to raise a concern I am also hearing from veterans that no similar initiative has been taken for Canadian soldiers deployed elsewhere who also lost their lives. An example is the Bosnian mission. I encourage members in the House to give careful thought to that request from our veterans.

It is high time for us to come together as a country to recognize more broadly the contributions of our Canadian Forces and the burdens that they and their families continue to bear. I was struck by the documentary aired on CPAC about a number of volunteer initiatives in this country to support Canadian veterans who are disabled and have become homeless, some long suffering from PTSD-type symptoms.

More must be done to honour their service. We must honour our long-standing sacred obligation to care for our injured veterans. As the member from across the floor mentioned this evening, yes, we need to build a permanent monument, but we also must assume the responsibility to ensure that those who return home injured or suffering from some form of mental distress or suffering from the cultural shock of returning to the wealth of Canada from a country such as Afghanistan receive our support to adjust back into Canadian society.

We must all reflect on this proposed memorial and dedicate ourselves not only to ensuring expenditures on the physical monument to those who have served but also to ensuring that all veterans are granted the assistance and care they deserve for the sacrifices they have made on our behalf.

I would like to add that I had the privilege of serving in a Canadian aid project in Bangladesh over a five-year period. I had the opportunity to travel to Chittagong. For those who are unaware, Chittagong borders between Bangladesh and Burma. There is a beautiful cemetery there that is maintained by the Bangladeshi, where are buried our young Canadian and British soldiers. It was very heart-rending to go through that cemetery and see all of the young Canadians who had given their lives, but what was most heart-rending was seeing the dedication of the Bangladeshi people to honour the service that our Canadian Forces gave for their protection and seeing the cemetery being so beautifully maintained.

I recently met with some veterans in Edmonton, and they called upon me to speak to my colleagues here to make sure that we maintain the burial sites of our veterans who have returned home with the same initiative as they are maintained in Bangladesh and in Europe. I look forward to taking up that matter.

Private Members' Business

In closing, I commend the member for bringing forward the motion and I look forward to supporting it.

● (1905)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise today in the House to echo the comments of my colleagues on this side of the House, as well as on the other side, about the importance of honouring, recognizing, and remembering the service of many Canadians in Afghanistan.

It is important to thank the hon. member for Palliser for his tireless efforts in this regard, championing the concept of a memorial and of remembering. I also want to compliment the member for Sault Ste. Marie, with whom I had the pleasure of serving on the veterans affairs committee. He is a tireless champion for the men and women of the Canadian Forces and for our veterans.

This motion should get support from all members in the House, and it sounds to me as though this is one of these rare but very important moments in the House when we unite to do the right thing, to pay respect to those who have served on our behalf. Our government, and indeed all members of the House, support paying tribute to and remembering Canadians who have served and are serving in Afghanistan. As we know, there are men and women due to return to Canada at the end of March, so we are in the final two months of this very important mission that Canadian Forces members served on our behalf.

I had the privilege, before I was elected to Parliament, to be in the Senate to watch the ceremony related to the end of the mission in Libya. General Bouchard was the Canadian officer who led the international effort in Libya. That was a short, multilateral mission, and a successful one, in which Canadian expertise, precision, and leadership played an important role, and that was recognized. Afghanistan has been one of our longest missions as a country. Blood has been expended, as 158 of our finest people gave their lives. We have to not only memorialize them but also remember their service and the contributions they made to peace and security and a better life for many in that country.

Where I stand today represents the sacrifices Canadians have made and our tradition of heeding the call to serve the wider global good since the founding of our country. In the Peace Tower, the Book of Remembrance turns a page each day, and on each page are the names of young men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Beneath that tower is the chamber, which we are in, that allows speech and debate, lively at times, that has been secured by their sacrifice. We need to remember that as we debate important motions like this one.

Not far from me, on the west side of Centre Block, lies the Vimy stone, which was built by the masons into the side of a rebuilt Parliament of Canada following the fire the year before. The stonemasons heard of Canada's tremendous victory at Vimy Ridge and laid a special Vimy stone in the building they were constructing, representing our democracy here in Canada and the security we enjoy because we have sent our sons and daughters to other parts of the world to ensure that security is spread, even though in many cases we are protected by the blanket of distance.

I have referred many times in my short time here to the statue of George Baker in the foyer of the Commons, a sitting member of Parliament who died on the battlefields of World War I. I have also spoken about my intention to work with others in Parliament to honour the memory of Colonel Sam Sharpe, the MP from Uxbridge in my riding, who died during World War I at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal after suffering the stresses of war. I am going to work with colleagues to make sure that his sacrifice is remembered as well.

We are steps from the National War Memorial, where each November Canadians gather amid cold, sleet, and snow to pay respect to our veterans and to honour the memory of those who never returned to Canada, whether from the fields of Europe, from the battlefields of Korea, from peacekeeping duties or active service on NATO missions, or in recent years as a result of service in Kandahar and parts of Afghanistan. We remember them, and we remember the Unknown Soldier at the National War Memorial.

● (1910)

In Confederation Park, we have the Korean War monument. It is not far from here. Last year our government inaugurated 2013, the Year of the Korean War Veteran, because governments should have honoured that service many years ago. In some ways, veterans have called that the "forgotten war". Confederation Park is also home to a monument to some of our first nations veterans. It is important for Canadians visiting their capital to see these important memorials.

Memorials of some of our winners of the Victoria Cross, our highest award for gallantry, line Wellington Street, mere yards from here as well. If one turns onto Sussex Drive, there is a striking and important monument to our peacekeepers and the many missions that Canada served, since we, in many ways, helped spearhead the concept of a stability and security force as part of our multilateral efforts through the United Nations.

Within this context, the mission in Afghanistan deserves particular attention because it has been our most significant military engagement since Korea and one of our longest engagements in terms of the period of time that Canadians have been committed, in terms of our sacrifice of our treasure and resources to this mission, and in terms of our diplomatic efforts. We need to have a memorial and we need to make sure we write the histories and remember the sacrifice we made in this critical part of our history.

As I said, 158 Canadians gave their lives in service where their country sent them. As a former military officer I know, as some members of this House know, that there is an unlimited liability contract that soldiers sign with the military when they serve their country. Fortunately, the vast majority do not provide that unlimited liability, but 158 of our best and brightest did, and they deserve a proper memorial.

Private Members' Business

Over 2,000 members were injured in service and will continue to show the signs of their sacrifice for our country. We must work with them to remember their colleagues and tell their stories. We lost a diplomat, a journalist, and five civilians. We must tell those stories and teach our children so that the memory remains alive.

There are monuments already forming. Canadians, in many ways, gave probably the most touching tribute when they showed up on highways during our repatriations. Now there is a repatriation monument in Trenton. Canada Company, 1st C.A.V. motorcycle club, Legions, and average Canadians donated to make that happen.

Portraits of Honour, a stunning series by artist Dave Sopha, has toured the country. We had those portraits at some of the charitable events I used to organize so that we could see the faces of our fallen.

As the Minister of Justice and the MP for Edmonton Centre have proposed recently and as members of the Canadian Forces have said, the Trans Canada Trail has the potential to honour our fallen, perhaps portions of the trail uniting our country near the communities where our fallen came from.

Most importantly, the cenotaphs around this country mark the combat role Canada played in Afghanistan in our service. My community of Bowmanville honoured Trooper Darryl Caswell on our cenotaph. Cenotaphs across Canada rarely get touched for generations, but this mission touched cenotaphs across our country. I know the family of Captain Matthew Dawe, another fine Canadian we lost in Afghanistan. There was Captain Nichola Goddard. The list goes on. They will also be marked on the cenotaphs in their communities.

These are times when we need to mark their service and what they gave in pursuit of Canadian goals and ideals around the world—mark it in their communities on their cenotaphs with their Legion members and their families, but also mark it here in our nation's capital.

I want to end with some words from Rupert Brooke's poem *The Dead*. Some of these words are found on the Memorial Arch on the grounds of RMC; cadets march in through it and then march out through it.

• (1915)

These are those words:

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

We can show our heritage with this monument.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP)
Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on Motion No. M-448, on the creation of a memorial for veterans of Afghanistan.

I would first like to thank the member for Palliser for introducing this motion that seeks to honour those Canadians who served, and in some cases gave their lives, in the mission in Afghanistan. The motion before us is an important one that the NDP is proud to support.

As Canadians, we have a duty to recognize the exceptional contributions and sacrifices made by the men and women who defended Canada and our allies in Afghanistan, whether as members of the Canadian Armed Forces, our diplomatic corps, or as international aid workers.

With almost 40,000 troops deployed over the years, including 158 who lost their lives and 2,000 more who were wounded, our soldiers' efforts certainly deserve to be recognized by a memorial in our national capital. Such a memorial was erected at the time at the airport in Kandahar, but it was brought home to Canada. It is now being displayed in every corner of the country, so that Canadians can fulfill their duty to remember. The proposal is to eventually reassemble the memorial and locate it in the national capital region.

The memorial includes 190 plaques honouring the 201 people who died in combat. The memorial is a powerful symbol of the Canadian commitment to Afghanistan. Its symbolism would provide a unique reminder of the sacrifice that marked the history of this Canadian military action overseas.

Whatever our opinion of the Canadian mission itself, no one in the House can deny the courage, the perseverance and the sacrifices of our soldiers during the mission. That is what we in the NDP wish to remember. Every one of us has a duty to honour those who went into combat and those who lost their lives there.

I come from a military family. Over the course of my life, I have witnessed the dedication and courage of the men and women who proudly serve their country in the Canadian Armed Forces. Both of my parents are still active members of the Canadian Forces, and my grandfather, who celebrated his 90th birthday a few months ago, had a long career with the Canadian army. He is a Korean War veteran. Throughout my childhood, my family taught me to have tremendous respect for our soldiers and their commitment to defending their country and the values of freedom and democracy that are so dear to Canadians.

As a member of Parliament, I have had the great honour on many occasions to greet soldiers who were returning from the mission in Afghanistan as they arrived at Jean-Lesage airport in Quebec City. In my brief exchanges with them as I shook their hands, I could immediately see the courage and determination of these women and men who were returning from the mission. Some of them were barely older than I was, and some were younger, but regardless of their age they were prepared to sacrifice everything to ensure that their mission would be successful.

Private Members' Business

Before I became a member of Parliament, I was a tour guide in 2007 and had the opportunity to take some visitors to the Memorial Chamber here in Parliament. It was always very moving to see loved ones come to look at the books containing the names of their family members killed in combat.

We are already doing a good job upholding our duty to remember in Canada, and creating a memorial for our veterans who proudly served in Afghanistan would be a further step in recognizing them. We have a duty to remember the sacrifices made by veterans and their families. That is why I am very proud to support Motion No. 448.

An Afghan veterans monument would provide the recognition that is essential for honouring the commitment and bravery of our soldiers. However, we cannot just use fine words, cenotaphs and monuments scattered across the country to show our appreciation. We must also recognize our veterans by providing effective and accessible services that are adapted to the realities of our soldiers and veterans. It is not enough to erect monuments. It is essential to provide our veterans with the necessary tools for coping with the difficulties and challenges they face before, during and after a mission.

● (1920)

As I was saying earlier, I appreciate and commend the initiative of the hon. member for Palliser. However, I cannot help but notice the irony of debating a motion to pay tribute to veterans, when the Conservatives' latest budget does nothing to restore the services that have been taken away from veterans since the Conservatives came to power. I find that extremely unfortunate.

In the budget that was brought down yesterday, there is absolutely nothing for the health care that is provided to our soldiers or for enhancing the services they receive upon their return to Canada.

The Conservative MPs did not have much to say when this government unilaterally decided to close the regional offices that provided services directly to our veterans.

They unfortunately kept their mouths shut when the Minister of Veterans Affairs treated our veterans with utter contempt a couple of weeks ago. The same was true yesterday, when the Minister of Finance decided to turn a deaf ear to the calls of the veterans and the opposition to maintain or restore services.

Yesterday, the Conservatives were all proud to announce a \$2 million investment to provide more services online to veterans, when that sum barely represents 1% of everything they cut from the Veterans Affairs budget.

They cannot claim to defend veterans and then take actions that go against everything we have been trying to achieve throughout the year. That is an inconsistent and completely incomprehensible position.

Despite the Conservatives' daily inconsistencies and their apparent lack of concern for the dire needs of our soldiers returning from missions, it is still important to show our appreciation by supporting such a motion. The motion moved by the member for Palliser has merit, and that is why the NDP decided to support it.

No one on this side of the House is against the troops. Sometimes the NDP questions the government on certain missions it wishes to embark upon and the goals it is trying to attain with our army. Our opinions sometimes differ on those issues. The goal here in the House is to debate and make the decisions that are best for Canadians.

Those discussions and debates do not diminish the respect and admiration that NDP members have for our veterans. I want to make that very clear in this speech. We are working to ensure that veterans, who have so courageously served their country, are well served when they come back to Canada and need our help.

Canada's efforts in Afghanistan warrant a respectful and dignified approach. Those men and women fought for noble values. They fought for freedom and democracy. They worked to offer the Afghan people the stability and security they are seeking.

As Canadians and as parliamentarians, each one of us has the duty to acknowledge and remember that. We can carry out that duty by creating a memorial, for one. However, it should also be reflected in quality services and sustained support before, during and after missions abroad.

Our duty to remember is fulfilled, in part, by erecting cenotaphs, holding ceremonies and remembering what our soldiers have done for us over the years. However, beyond that, we have a responsibility—today, right now—to do everything in our power as parliamentarians to ensure that our veterans are not left out in the cold, as is happening now.

● (1925)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not on the list initially tonight, but I am really pleased to have the opportunity to add to this debate.

There is obviously unanimity in the House about the need to recognize and celebrate the spirit of our troops, army, navy and air force, who served in Afghanistan. I have to say I was a little disappointed at the last speaker's remarks. It took away from the dignity of this motion.

I do, as we all do, recognize the duty to honour, the duty to remember, the obligation that we have. It is important that people of good faith on all sides remember that obligation and work together, despite the challenges. Of course there are challenges, but we need to work together to overcome those.

I want to talk about the mission in Afghanistan and the people who prosecuted that mission on our behalf and on behalf of the people of Afghanistan. Being from Edmonton, I realize there is a huge connection between that mission and my city and the people of Edmonton.

Private Members' Business

Earlier today in a Standing Order 31 statement, I spoke about the reception the troops received when they came back to Edmonton, which is like nowhere else in Canada. No matter the time of day or night, no matter the weather, a group of people was there giving out Tim Hortons coffee, doughnuts, and so on. The Edmonton Police Service was there. The RCMP was there. With their sirens blaring and lights flashing, they provided an escort through the centre of the city of Edmonton to the garrison on the north side of the city. I was in that convoy a number of times. It was extremely moving. I know the soldiers appreciated it very much.

On one particular day, I knew the air crew flying the Airbus which had been escorted into Edmonton by two CF-18s in a colourful display of support. The captain of the Airbus asked air traffic control for clearance to fly across the city at low altitude with the F-18s in tow. For those who know Edmonton's 97 Street, it is kind of the main north-south drag, and about 1,000 or 1,500 feet above, there was a Canadian Forces Airbus with an F-18 on each wing, very visible and very loud. The phone calls started to come in. As soon as people found out what it was, they asked if they could come back again. That is the kind of spirit Edmonton and I know the rest of the country has for those men and women.

There are other organizations in Edmonton, a couple of which have been alluded to by other colleagues. We have something in Edmonton called Project Heroes which commemorates with portraits the 158 soldiers we lost, as was done elsewhere. We have an organization called No Stone Left Alone. It is not just about Afghan vets, but about vets writ large. Their objective is to put a poppy on every veteran's headstone in Canada, eventually, around Remembrance Week. I think they are up to about 15,000 in Edmonton alone, and it is growing.

When we talk about the mission in Afghanistan, the question will ultimately be, was it worth it? Everybody can answer that in their own way. I can say that I was very familiar with the mission from a variety of angles. One was defending the reputation of our soldiers over there when they were being accused of being war criminals by some people in this House. I will not bother going into the politics of that, but it was absolutely shameful. I was extremely proud to be on the front lines of defending those men and women and the honour that they displayed.

I saw them in action. On seven occasions I spent time with our troops in Afghanistan. That will be the highlight of my time as a member of Parliament, the time I spent in Afghanistan. Waking up Christmas morning, which I did five times, at a forward operating base somewhere in the Panjwai district with those kinds of people is something I will certainly never forget.

We talk about progress. One little vignette that I mention often occurred on Christmas Eve 2006. I was standing in a place called Masum Ghar, looking out over the countryside. It was dark and rainy. I had a cup of coffee and a cigar with the chief of the defence staff, Rick Hillier, and somebody else. We were standing there looking over the countryside. It was bleak. There were bombs going off in the distance. It was pretty grim. That was my first visit. I knew that it was real and that what was happening there was regrettably real.

One year to the minute later, Christmas Eve 2007 at Masum Ghar, I was with the new chief of the defence staff and the minister of national defence, now the Minister of Justice, the member for Central Nova, having a cup of coffee and a cigar, looking out over the exact same piece of territory. It looked like a scene from the Canadian Prairies. The lights were on in all the villages. It was quiet and peaceful. Just that one little thing said to me that what those men and women did was incredibly worthwhile.

● (1930)

I visited a number of times after that and saw the progress they had made with schools and interacting with the children. They were interacting with the Afghan institutions, government institutions like the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, which they did a tremendous job of training.

I had the pleasure of spending time there with people like Rick Mercer and Mary Walsh, and on my last trip there, Don Cherry, who was understandably a pretty big hit with the troops. I spent time with Ron Joyce, who was the co-founder of Tim Hortons. He threw open the Tim Hortons—I think it was 2006 or 2007—for two days and wrote a personal cheque at the end of those two days for everything that was given away.

Our troops were leaders in Afghanistan. We were the go-to folks. We were smallish in numbers, compared to the Americans and the British, but we provided the leadership. Our training, the quality of our people, and the quality of our equipment was second to none. At the end of the Afghanistan conflict, and I think it is still true today, Canada has the best small army in the world. When I say army I mean army, navy, and air force. It is because of the kind of people we have that we are commemorating with this monument.

I have another little story about the spirit of our men and women in uniform who went back, some of them four times. They fought to go back, which I am sure drove their families crazy. It was because they knew they were making a difference. On one of the Edmonton rotations, there were eight or nine soldiers going back for the fourth time. The commander, the brigadier general, called each of them in to have a little heart-to-heart, just to make sure their heads were on straight, since they were going back there for the fourth time. He asked one master corporal what his biggest fear was about going back to Afghanistan for the fourth time. The master corporal looked him in the eye and said, "It is that you won't let me go, sir", whereupon the brigadier general said, "Carry on; you are fine".

I was at the airport many times seeing people off or welcoming people back, and I was seeing this particular group of soldiers off. There were about 150 of them. I was standing, chatting with four or five of them. I recounted the story of the brigadier general and the master corporal. They kind of laughed, and one guy piped up and said, "That was me". I shook his hand and said "Good on you; the people of Afghanistan are going to be much better off because of people like you".

The people of Canada are obviously much better off because of people like him, whether they are Princess Patricias, RCRs, Van Doos, engineers, or Lord Strathconas, with the Leopards, and there were a lot of air force and navy personnel there. I had a lot of friends there with whom I had served in one of my previous lives. I saw some of them there in Afghanistan. I have had the rare privilege of seeing that. Not many people have. I am tremendously honoured, privileged, and grateful for that opportunity to spend time there with those people.

Therefore, I understand the importance of doing everything we can to recognize their service and sacrifice. There were 158 who made the ultimate sacrifice, plus five civilians. I have had the sad honour of attending many ramp ceremonies and things of that nature and going back to Kandahar year after year and watching that memorial grow, tragically, as it inevitably would.

It is incredibly important that we do everything we can to celebrate, not war, but the spirit of the kind of people who will stand up time after time and lay it on the line for someone halfway around the world whom they have never met and will never see again. They know they have made a difference. In making a difference, in this case, for the people of Afghanistan, they have made a huge difference for the people of Canada, and there is nothing I would not do personally—and I am sure everyone in the House feels pretty much the same way—to help celebrate that spirit and what those people have meant to us.

This is obviously going to be unanimously approved by the House and that is absolutely the way it should be. I can think of no better thing to do at this moment.

•(1935)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I invite the hon. member for Palliser for his right of reply. The hon. member has five minutes.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words to address points I have heard over the course of the evening in this debate. First of all, let me give a heartfelt thanks to the opposition members and government members who have taken time out of their busy day to join us here and be part of the celebration of the people who gave it all in the Afghan conflict.

We have heard themes about the importance of commemorating and supporting our veterans and their families. We have heard about the word “duty” and what that means. I humbly suggest that we owe a great duty to the people who went before us and defended peace, prosperity, and the right of democracy in Afghanistan.

First of all, let me talk for a minute about commemoration. Commemoration serves as a solace for family left behind. Commemoration gives thanks from those who bear witness. Commemoration teaches our young people to value their freedom.

Everyone realizes the importance of remembering our forces that fought on Vimy Ridge and Juno Beach and in other conflicts. We cannot forget those who fought for the freedom we enjoy here today.

Second, I would like to take a minute to note the increased support that veterans have received from 2006 onward, when the Conservative government took office. Allow me to share some financial facts with the House. The government has increased

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investments in veterans benefits by nearly \$5 billion in new funding since coming to office.

Funding has increased, while the number of veterans has unfortunately decreased. I will point to some of the figures that indicate there has been a change in the demographics. There were 695,700 veterans in 2013, a drop of approximately 31,000 people. Meanwhile, spending has risen from just under \$3 billion to \$4.7 billion. This increased support has led to the expansion of different programs for veterans, set a minimum monthly allowance for veterans in rehabilitation, and more.

Is it money well spent? Members can bet their last dollar it is. We owe these soldiers a great debt. We owe it to them to remember their sacrifice for us. We owe it to our returning soldiers to thank them and their families for their service.

This motion would take steps to pay tribute to the service of our veterans, especially those who paid the ultimate price. We have heard from a number of the speakers this evening about the 158 who did not return. I hope all of my colleagues support this important motion and will pay tribute to our vets from Afghanistan.

Ladies and gentlemen, lest we forget.

•(1940)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 26, 2014, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1945)

[*Translation*]

SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 7, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair)

Government Orders

Hon. Christian Paradis (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved:

That this Committee take note of the situation in the Central African Republic.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind the hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold.

[*English*]

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. Members may divide their time with another member.

[*Translation*]

The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak.

Pursuant to the order made on Thursday, February 6, 2014, the Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent.

[*English*]

Members are reminded that during a take note debate, members are free to take the seat of their choice in the chamber.

[*Translation*]

We will now begin tonight's take note debate.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise and speak during this important debate.

[*English*]

Our government is deeply concerned by the crisis currently unfolding in the Central African Republic, most particularly by the deteriorating humanitarian and protection situation and its devastating impact on innocent civilians.

[*Translation*]

In March 2013, a rebel coalition known as Séléka staged a coup, ousting the president at the time, François Bozizé. After the coup, the rebel-led government was no longer able to control its former soldiers. Furthermore, the government was unable to establish any semblance of rule of law.

Not surprisingly, the security situation deteriorated considerably. For decades, groups of different faith communities had been living side by side without any animosity. However, the violence of recent months has ignited religious tensions. The Séléka groups, which are primarily Muslim, and the militias, which are primarily Christian, are locked in a never-ending battle. The fighting is especially fierce in the northwestern and southern regions of the country. Violence, looting and heinous crimes committed by these groups have increased dramatically. Acts of self-defence between neighbours of different faiths are now commonplace. In the capital Bangui alone, at least 10 people are killed every day as a result of looting, firefights or targeted attacks.

[*English*]

We are hearing increased reports of looting, extortion, lynching, arbitrary arrest, torture, summary execution, sexual violence, and

child recruitment. Across the country, most of these are perpetrated by roving bands of armed people. The humanitarian consequences of this conflict are staggering.

[*Translation*]

All 4.6 million inhabitants of the country are affected. No region has been spared. According to the United Nations, over 2.5 million people need humanitarian aid, including food, clean water, basic sanitation, shelter and protection. Approximately two-thirds of the country's population does not have access to basic health care or basic drugs.

Over 825,000 people have been displaced so far because of the ongoing violence in the Central African Republic. Nearly half of those people are in the country's capital. Most of the people who have fled their homes have ended up in 66 different places in the capital city, including in a temporary camp near the country's international airport, now occupied by over 100,000 people. The people there are living in overcrowded conditions without adequate shelter or sanitation. These conditions could further deteriorate once the rainy season begins in a few months.

We are also extremely concerned about the food security situation in the country. As we all know, Canada is a leader in food security, and we find this situation alarming. Violence has destroyed markets and disrupted livelihoods and trade in all regions of the country, sharply increasing the cost of food.

This trend threatens to increase the number of Central Africans who do not have a dependable source of food, currently at 1.3 million people. These people are forced to depend on emergency food rations to survive. Constant danger means that aid organizations are having a harder and harder time meeting growing needs. Businesses and humanitarian organizations are being looted, which complicates the situation.

[*English*]

In spite of the challenges, humanitarian agencies have significantly ramped up their responses and Canada has been there to support these efforts. Through our international engagement, we have been strengthening the leadership capacity of humanitarian agencies on the ground. We have been supporting the expansion of their presence and operations outside of Bangui and we have been encouraging greater coordination of aid efforts.

We are heartened to see additional non-governmental organizations starting operations in the Central African Republic. Groups like Save the Children are having an important impact on the ground. Their presence has been a much-needed boost for the humanitarian capacity required to address the escalating needs. Agencies like these are delivering crucial life-saving aid, and Canada has supported these efforts.

● (1950)

[*Translation*]

In 2013, we more than doubled our humanitarian aid to those affected by the crisis. More than \$6.95 million went to meet the needs of the vulnerable, including those who have fled to neighbouring countries.

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[English]

With Canada's support, UNICEF provided treatment to over 10,000 severely malnourished children. It also delivered medical supplies that have benefited over 200,000 vulnerable people. Canada also supported Doctors Without Borders as they delivered primary and secondary health care. This included treating malnourished children in the northwestern region, one of the regions most affected by the violence. With Canada's support, the United Nations World Food Programme provided food for over 200,000 people in December alone.

[Translation]

I commend aid workers for the incredibly difficult work they do. They put their lives in danger to provide vital assistance to people in need. I am extremely proud of our fellow Canadians who are always on the front lines when needs manifest themselves. However, we must continue these efforts, especially in rural areas. We must increase protection by having a presence that is normally associated with humanitarian work.

Unfortunately, serious security problems still hamper these interventions. It is vital that we improve security if we want to reduce humanitarian needs, increase humanitarian workers' access and help them get more people on the ground.

That is why Canada contributed \$5 million to the African Union-led international support mission in the CAR. The mission efforts increase security, protect civilians and enable distribution of aid to the country.

[English]

Canada is also providing an additional \$5 million to aid humanitarian organizations in addressing the ongoing need. These contributions build on those that Canada has already made in the Central African Republic over the past several years. Since 2007 we have provided over \$25 million in humanitarian assistance.

Canada is always a leader in the response to crises around the globe. We are currently working in Syria, the Philippines, and South Sudan, just to name a few.

We do this because it saves countless innocent lives. Lives are at stake. Innocent civilians are facing unspeakable ends at the hands of ruthless criminals. Countless children have been separated from their families, and thousands of others have been swept into the fighting forces. There have been widespread reports of sexual and gender-based violence.

It is our responsibility to help those who cannot help themselves. It is the clearest expression of our most cherished Canadian values. In the face of such violence and grave human rights violations, Canada has stepped up to the plate.

[Translation]

We have made international humanitarian aid a priority, and we will continue to do our best to protect innocent civilians, increase observance of international human rights, facilitate the safe travel of aid workers and also support people affected by violence.

We are committed to providing effective humanitarian aid in a timely manner. The newly amalgamated department will allow

Canada to better respond to such crises and adapt our approach and our work in the most effective way.

[English]

Canada is a top donor to the humanitarian efforts in Central African Republic. We will continue to monitor the evolving situation closely, and we will continue to do what we can and must do to help the people of this war-torn country.

• (1955)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, I believe we share the minister's major concerns about the current situation in the Central African Republic.

We noticed that the government announced \$5 million in humanitarian aid, and I might come back to that later.

Given the urgency of the situation, when will the funds be released and will they be released quickly?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her excellent question.

If the \$5 million that was just announced is not released right away, it will be very shortly.

That is why we have been careful in our announcement to properly identify our partners, including UNICEF and Save the Children. These partners have developed projects that are virtually ready to be implemented.

However, we unfortunately have to deal with an unpredictable situation because of the unprecedented violence on the ground. Canada condemns the atrocities we have heard about.

We are urging all parties involved in the conflict to allow the humanitarian aid to go through and to be duly delivered to those in need. That is what really is at stake here.

Let me assure my colleague that the challenge is not with the bureaucracy and administration in Ottawa; the challenge is on the ground. The assistance is available and ready to be sent. The challenge is on the ground. We must ensure that the humanitarian corridor is open to those working in the field.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his comments. He painted an alarming picture of the situation.

[English]

It is very important for us to be able to accurately assess to what point this is alarming. To quote Amnesty International, they have actually begun to use the words "ethnic cleansing".

If we quote from Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, he says that "We must act concertedly and now to avoid continued atrocities on a massive scale".

At this point in time there is the possibility that this will escalate considerably. We welcome the \$5 million that has been added to our contribution. UNICEF, however, is saying that they need far more funding.

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I would ask the minister whether he would consider a greater contribution from Canada. I would also like to raise the point that the European Union has committed to sending 500 troops. This is over and above the 1,600 French troops and the 5,500 African troops. This is something that we have done in the past and we have done it well. Would Canada consider the possibility of sending troops to help stabilize the situation?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Chair, indeed we are gravely concerned about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic. As my colleague just mentioned, we see an escalation of violence there and we condemn this violence. As I said before, we need to make sure that humanitarian aid corridors are accessible. This is where the real challenge is, and this is why we are saying loudly that Canada expects all involved parties to respect this basic principle.

With the \$5 million we have announced, we are very confident that UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and organizations such as Save the Children will have solid plans to ensure that they do achieve what they want to achieve and we will make sure that they can have access to these corridors. This is why we committed \$5 million in December for the mission of stabilization. This funding is of course in support of the mission of stabilization in general, and in this regard my colleague referred to the French l'opération Sangaris. This is also why in 2013 we supported the CAR with \$6.95 million for the mission of stabilization, and have now just committed another \$5 million for its needs, especially in terms of nutrition.

So we will continue to work closely with our international partners to monitor the evolving humanitarian situation and we will remain prepared to respond accordingly.

• (2000)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, the minister just talked a bit about some of this new money that we have provided and the partners that we are working with, but we have been present in the Central African Republic for some time. I wonder if the minister could talk a bit about some of the historic investments we have made in capacity-building there, because we want to see these kinds of situations eliminated in the future.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Chair, indeed since 2007 we have invested over \$25 million in humanitarian assistance in the Central African Republic. These sums address urgent needs, such as by providing food assistance; increasing access to health services, as well as water and sanitation facilities; enhancing livelihood opportunities; and providing protection services for the most vulnerable. However, as we know now with all of the violence there, a lot of facilities have been destroyed. This is why we need to be there and recently committed new money quickly.

Once again, we do condemn this violence, and we have to ensure that the humanitarian aid has a safe corridor. We need to reach the people in need, and this is why we called very loudly on all of the partners involved to ensure that they respect this basic principle of allowing humanitarian aid to flow into the regions where the needs are. Basically in the Central African Republic, this is everywhere. So we do expect to have safe humanitarian corridors, despite the extreme violence in the country now.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his speech and for the answers he has provided up to now.

At the moment, a part of the conflict is very much linked to the fact that things between the Catholic and Muslim communities are completely out of control and that the country's principal Catholic and Muslim leaders are trying to find an avenue of reconciliation in order to calm things down.

Considering the deterioration of our diplomatic network in Africa, which unfortunately substantially reduces our ability to act, can the minister give us an idea of the resources that our diplomatic corps could deploy on the ground to facilitate that process and those efforts at reconciliation on the part of the Catholic bishops, the leaders of the Evangelical church and the imams in the Central African Republic?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

There is a ruthless war going on between Séléka Muslims and anti-balaka Christian militias. This is really a serious ethnic conflict that requires plenty of negotiation among the various parties involved.

However, the critical issue right now is the need for humanitarian aid. We know that 868,000 people have been displaced. There are between 225,000 and 250,000 refugees. That is a lot of people in a country of 4.6 million inhabitants.

Humanitarian aid is essential right now. There is humanitarian aid on the ground, but we have to protect the humanitarian corridor. Credible organizations such as UNICEF, the World Food Programme and Save the Children should have access to that corridor. They are the ones on the ground that know how to deal with this kind of situation.

At the same time, there is the security mission. The French are there with 1,600 soldiers on the ground. We are supporting them with the funds we invested in the mission of stabilization. Diplomatic presence is not necessarily the way to go. We really need to use the organizations on the ground to make a difference in terms of immediate needs for humanitarian aid and stabilization. When the situation calms down, we can start thinking about development. We will assess the needs then.

• (2005)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, as we know, the conflict in the Central African Republic is marked by dreadful violence. As conflicts too often do, it brings with it a terrible humanitarian situation. I believe that the situation in the Central African Republic is particularly terrible.

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It is said that 4.6 million people are affected by the current conflict, out of a population of scarcely more than 5 million. It is said that 2.3 million children are affected, that almost a million people, 20% of the population, have been displaced, and that there are a quarter of a million refugees in neighbouring countries, which are often not particularly stable themselves. It is said that the population has none of the most basic services, that medical clinics have been closed for more than six months, with an imminent fear of an epidemic of malaria and diarrhea, that schools are closed and that the food situation is more and more of a concern.

There is a reason that the UN has declared the humanitarian emergency in the Central African Republic to be at level 3. To give an idea of what level 3 means, I would point out that there are only three countries in the world at the moment with humanitarian emergencies at level 3. They are the Philippines, Syria and the Central African Republic.

Unfortunately, this crisis is talked about too little. I venture to hope that this evening's debate will succeed in moving the matter more into the public realm.

[*English*]

Indeed, I am afraid that we have not given the situation all the attention we should. This debate is welcome because we can raise interest in the issue and ensure that Canada does the right thing for the Central African Republic.

Maybe we do not give as much attention to the issue collectively because it is so far away, and we are troubled by so many things. Maybe it is because some people think it is another problem in a region that has its load of ongoing problems.

For the children recruited to fight in the conflict, the mothers or fathers whose children do not have enough to eat, and the young men beaten and killed as revenge for what someone in their ethnic or religious groups did, it is a terrible daily reality and a threat to their lives.

There are five million human beings suffering and under threat, and it is our human duty to respond to their plea. We also have to show that we have learned from the past and that we have learned, in particular, from what happened in Rwanda.

[*Translation*]

As if the current violence and disastrous humanitarian situation were not enough, now there are fears of ethnic cleansing. Amnesty International is talking about ethnic cleansing and there are concerns about a genocide.

In November, France's foreign affairs minister, Laurent Fabius, warned that the Central African Republic was on the verge of genocide. The United States also said that the country was in a pre-genocidal situation.

The United Nations humanitarian operations director added that the violence has all the elements that we have seen in places like Rwanda and Bosnia. The conditions are there for a genocide. Adama Dieng, UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, told the UN Security Council that if we do not act now and decisively he would not exclude the possibility of a genocide occurring. We must

act. Make no mistake, action is being taken, both inside and outside the country, of course.

Christian and Muslim leaders in the Central African Republic have made reconciliation efforts. That is a good sign, but they are facing tremendous challenges. The interim president, the former mayor of Bangui, seems to want to bring some order to the situation, but we must recognize that she has very limited means.

The international community is increasingly taking note and taking action. On Friday, the International Criminal Court launched an investigation into potential war crimes in the country. The European Union has just decided to send troops to support the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic, or MISCA, which is an African-led mission backed by the United Nations Security Council and France.

The UN is appealing to everyone to provide the necessary support. Organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and Doctors Without Borders are on the ground.

Of course, Canada must contribute and do its part. In that regard, I think that the \$5 million announced in emergency humanitarian aid is a step in the right direction. However, it is not a lot considering that the UN is appealing for \$551 million for the first three months. This goes to show how \$5 million is, unfortunately, a drop in the bucket. That is one dollar for every Central African. It is not a lot, but it is a step in the right direction.

There are other options that Canada should also consider. There is the issue of security in the country. Should we contribute to that? There is also the issue of long-term development. Poverty and inequality give rise to violence. That is one source of the problem.

In broader terms, there is the issue of our involvement in Africa. We pulled out of Africa, even though the continent still needs us and always will, and even though it can offer us so much now and in the future. It could be a much more significant partner than it is currently.

We should be looking to the future. Canada could ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, which it has yet to do. We know that arms fuel conflicts. We could take measures to ensure that natural resource development does not perpetuate conflicts, as the hon. member for Ottawa Centre proposes in his private member's bill. We know that the Central African Republic has significant resources.

We need to help Central Africans. We owe it to them. We need to take strong action immediately.

● (2015)

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canada has a long tradition of peacekeeping. The brave men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces have proven their strength, capability, and commitment in Afghanistan and in so many other places around the world.

Does the hon. member think we should draw on this tradition and the experiences of our armed forces to help bring stability to CAR through participation in a UN peacekeeping operation, or with the EU, which is urgently needed in the Central African Republic?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for her excellent question.

Generally speaking, the members on this side of the House believe that peacekeeping is a great Canadian tradition that has fallen by the wayside in recent years. I believe that Canada now ranks 57th in its contribution to peacekeeping efforts.

In the situation before us, Canada needs to work with its partners to look at what each country can do better in order to urgently respond to what is happening. This is a humanitarian and security crisis, and there is a risk of genocide. We need to respond. However, we also need to have a long-term vision for our involvement in Africa and for development.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Chair, does my colleague think that this would be a good time for Canada to have a seat on the United Nations Security Council and to still be a major player internationally?

It seems to me that we have been relegated to the minor leagues for the past few years, that we need to rebuild our image by taking action and that we should be learning from Senator Dallaire's experiences.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his very interesting question.

Indeed, we cannot help but think of General Dallaire when comparing this situation to Rwanda. I have no doubt that he is just as troubled as we are by what is happening in the Central African Republic.

A seat on the United Nations Security Council would certainly help Canada. It is only natural for Canada to have a seat on the United Nations Security Council and to play an active role in these major international affairs.

However, in order to win that seat, we need to prove that Canada is a serious player and a real partner. We first need to prove that we do not only care about other countries when we need them or when we want to sell them something, and that Canada is a stable, serious partner.

Unfortunately, we have not proven this in Africa. The situation in the Central African Republic would be a good opportunity for us to get to work and restore our image, which, unfortunately, has become quite tarnished in recent years.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am surprised that no government member is rising to ask my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie some questions.

What does she think of that?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, in one sense it surprises me and in another it does not.

I do not want to get into the usual practices but, often, even when it comes to important matters, life and death matters, genocide and so forth, the other side of the House is not as attentive as we would like.

Indeed, no one is rising and no one is asking questions about this issue. There are not many people present. That is surprising and disappointing. That explains why our reputation is so tarnished.

● (2020)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, one of the issues we heard earlier from the government, and I have talked to my colleague about this, is the idea of having some sort of humanitarian corridor. When we get to speak to the government later, I am interested in whether it is adopting that as a policy.

We have heard of peace corridors. Certainly, my colleague and I have talked about that when it comes to Syria.

One of the challenges in the Central African Republic right now is getting support, food, and aid, to the communities that need it. As the member is a specialist, a former diplomat who understands Africa well, I would like to hear her opinion on having corridors to help get the aid to people, and how we might organize that kind of approach.

We would also like to hear later on, perhaps, from the government about whether it supports that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, yes, that is a major issue, particularly in Syria.

It is also a major issue in the Central African Republic, but it should not be an excuse for inaction. Many people in Bangui, the capital, are in dire straits.

I heard today that people are fleeing the fighting and taking refuge in planes that are stranded at the Bangui airport. Those people are not far from the capital, so it should be relatively easy to reach them. As for a humanitarian corridor, this situation is different than Syria, but that should not be an excuse for inaction.

My colleague was kind enough to point out that I lived in Africa. In Africa, the main challenges are often related to communication. Roads are not paved and villages are far from each other, in remote areas. I would like to point out how important it is to work with organizations that have experience on the ground. Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders and UNICEF are all organizations with considerable experience on the ground. They are very familiar with the challenges in sub-Saharan Africa in general and in this country in particular.

Yes, there are challenges. No one is denying that, but that is all the more reason to take meaningful action.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Chair, could my colleague tell us, based on her past experience, whether this kind of mission is safe for Canadian humanitarian workers?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, there are obviously always risks with this kind of mission. I greatly admire the humanitarian workers who go into these kinds of situations.

That is why it is important to work with organizations that have significant experience on the ground. We need to do this primarily for Central Africans, but I admire these humanitarian workers so much that I believe we need to provide them with substantial support as well.

Giving \$5 million in aid is a step in the right direction, but it is just a drop in the bucket. That is \$1 per citizen of CAR. Some quick math shows that that would be 15¢ or 17¢ per Canadian.

There is a tremendous need. Central Africans need us to help them, and humanitarian workers need our support.

• (2025)

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, for the past weeks, aid agencies and international media have reported how the Central African Republic, or CAR, has plunged into unspeakable violence. We must act now, together, and decisively to stop this tragedy.

The United Nations ranked CAR a level 3 emergency among the top three humanitarian emergencies globally and warned:

The elements are there, the seeds are there, for a genocide. It has all the elements that we have seen elsewhere, in places like Rwanda and Bosnia.

These mass atrocities we continue to witness cannot be ignored. We share a moral responsibility to do whatever we can to protect the people of CAR from this violence and to prevent further violence, death, displacement, and hardship. While the world has repeatedly promised “never again,” it remains at constant risk of witnessing another “ever again”.

I want to thank all parties for agreeing to my request for this take-note debate. CAR stands at a humanitarian and moral crossroads. Together, let us ensure we ask the right questions tonight so that this human tragedy does not become another human catastrophe, and that Canada will do its very best and play a critical role in stopping the slaughter.

The violence in CAR has pitted Christians and Muslims, militias and civilians against one another, and plunged this already struggling country into deep chaos. Before the crisis began, CAR was one of the poorest countries in the world, land locked, largely forgotten by other nations, and one child in CAR died every 21 minutes from preventable causes. Today, this situation is far worse. There are 4.6 million people have been affected, half of them children, and 838,000 displaced. Attacks against children have sunk to atrocious, indefensible levels.

Souleymane Diabate, UNICEF country representative in CAR, said that in his twenty years of work with UNICEF, never had he seen anything like what is happening. He said that children are being directly targeted in violent attacks—even decapitated—and that boys and girls are being recruited into armed groups as child soldiers or to be sexually exploited, and children are witnessing unimaginable violence.

He said:

“Targeted attacks against children are a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law and must stop immediately. Concrete action is needed now to prevent violence against children”.

Government Orders

We must all understand that this conflict is not limited to the territory of CAR. The impact has already spread to the rest of the region. There are 225,000 refugees who have fled to Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and African rebel groups, the Lord's Resistance Army, and Sudanese rebel groups are currently operating out of CAR.

What should we think about tonight, in the weeks going forward and in the longer term?

First, the NGOs are concerned about the lack of awareness of the crisis. What can the government do to raise awareness of the crisis in the international community and what steps can it take to raise awareness here at home, in Canada? Second, can Canada play a role in conflict resolution? Christians and Muslims have lived side by side in relative peace until fairly recently. CAR's archbishop and leading imam are calling for an inter-religious reconciliation effort. Will Canada play a role in conflict resolution through its conflict management and governance funds?

Then there is the issue of funding. The UN has asked for \$551 million in aid, but, to date, has only received 11% of the needed funds. Canada has given \$16.9 million to date. The U.S. has pledged \$110 million and another \$60 million in humanitarian aid. The European Union is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to CAR, with \$76 million euros in 2013. In December 2013, the European Commission gave \$45 million euros and \$23 million euros in development funds.

As the second largest donor to la Francophonie, will Canada contribute more? What steps will it take to help NGOs raise funds and will it specify where the funds will go and for what they will be used?

• (2030)

Serious concerns have been expressed about the ability of the under-resourced African Union force, or MISCA, to protect civilians and restore security. The arrival of French troops has helped to improve the situation, but a more robust presence is necessary to stabilize the country.

Would the government consider funding the current troops on the ground in CAR, or consider sending logistical support? What is the government's plan to help stabilize CAR in the short term? We are hearing from the NGOs that they need help to scale up quickly. They need more lifesaving humanitarian aid, now, before the rainy season begins and their ability to reach outside the capital will be drastically reduced.

What will Canada do to help relieve immediate suffering? Will the government consider humanitarian, logistical, or material support?

Extreme violence took place in Bangui and other locales during the past week. More people from various communities were exposed to attacks and remain stranded in internally displaced sites or homes.

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Last Friday, international criminal court prosecutor Bensouda announced that after reviewing many reports detailing acts of extreme brutality by various groups and allegations of serious crimes, her office will open a preliminary inquiry into the situation in CAR. In her words:

The allegations include hundreds of killings, acts of rape and sexual slavery, destruction of property, pillaging, torture, forced displacement and recruitment and use of children in hostilities.

The security situation remains unpredictable and volatile. Institutions have failed. The health care system has collapsed. Children have been out of school for months. The reality is that 2.5 million people need assistance. We heard from Médecins Sans Frontières that in the northwest where people are hiding in the bush, they are so frightened that the doctors have to approach on foot and that 90% of the people have malaria.

These are problems that cannot be solved with a short-term, band-aid solution. How will the government help to aid and stabilize CAR in the medium and long term?

For example, will the government invest in the reconstruction of the education system so that children can regain stability, begin the reconciliation process, and have hope for the future? How will the government work with the United Nations and other likeminded nations to aid in developing, implementing, and maintaining a long-term development and assistance plan for CAR?

Will Canada support peace and stability by offering to act as the negotiator and intermediary? Will Canada support the organization and monitoring of fair and free elections that will take place in one year?

Again, I want to thank all my colleagues for coming together and agreeing to this take note debate, and to remind us all that in April, we will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Rwanda genocide, when at least 800,000 Rwandans were murdered over a 100-day period in the fastest genocide of the 20th century.

Together, let us ensure we pay attention to early-warning signs of mass atrocities, and take every measure available to us to prevent a preventable crime.

Finally, what we do or fail to do now will have an impact on society for years to come, and we will be judged on how we choose to act.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, the member opposite asked whether Canada would give any money toward humanitarian aid.

I did want to point out that Canada contributed over \$6.9 million last year in humanitarian assistance to help meet their urgent needs. We help by providing clean water, food, basic health care, and protection.

Did the member not hear that just recently we also committed another \$5 million?

• (2035)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for the question.

We are aware that the government gave \$5 million right before this debate. We are glad for the funding.

However, Canada's partners have mobilized significant resources, both financial and material, to assist the French and African Union in protecting civilian populations and restoring security in CAR. The U.S. alone has contributed over \$100 million and provided strategic airlift to African peacekeepers from Rwanda and Burundi.

Surely we can and must do more.

I put this question back to the government: what more is the government planning on doing to assist our partners in protecting civilians in the Central African Republic?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulo, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I have had the great privilege to come into contact with representatives from the Central African Republic community and the Republic of Congo community in my constituency. To be specific, people in those communities in Quebec City are very active, and they approached me last spring as the crisis was just beginning.

I must confess that my heart bled for them. Their concern was palpable; you could see it on their faces. At the time, of course, I could listen, but I could also look at what they were proposing and whether there was any glimmer of hope.

Can my colleague tell us what hope we can offer to the people from that region of Africa who now live here? They are enormously worried about their loved ones and their home country.

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Chair, I think having this take note debate tonight and raising this issue on the national agenda is a start, but what is needed is more money, more assistance.

I would like to bring the attention of this House to the plight of children. The horrific killing, abuse and harm being inflicted upon children are an affront to humanity. The lives of children in this crisis cannot be forgotten. This vicious conflict is now affecting more than 2.3 million children. Children are being killed because they are Christian or Muslim. Children are being forced to flee their homes and hide in terror to avoid the fighters. Children are witnessing horrific acts of violence. Children, possibly as many as 6,000, are being recruited into armed groups.

Those who continue to harm children must be held accountable. The children of the Central African Republic are counting upon us.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Chair, first, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague for spearheading this issue, for instigating this debate this evening, and for providing us with a window into this horrible situation on the ground.

Awareness of course is a pre-condition to galvanizing meaningful action.

Every nation has a history. We have a history. It is important that our history inform our policies, including our foreign policy.

Government Orders

I wonder if the hon. member is aware whether the government is consulting people like retired General Roméo Dallaire, who not only lived through a similar situation but has done and is doing important work to end the scourge of child soldiers. Is the government reaching across the aisle and consulting people like the member for Mount Royal, and members of the party to my right, and members of the government's own caucus who might not be in cabinet?

Is it not important to have this kind of non-partisan effort in this terrible situation?

• (2040)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Chair, this is a humanitarian crisis. We have promised never again, and it is ever again. We have to act.

I stress that \$16.9 million is not enough.

I am not aware of the government reaching out. That is why I have called for this debate.

I would like to bring another issue to the House's attention, which is health care. People living in the Central African Republic are in desperate need of quality health care. Even before the conflict, the country was one of the world's worst in terms of health. One child died every 21 minutes. Life expectancy is just 47 years, and it is worse now.

A total of 838,000 people are currently displaced in the country. That is more than 18% of the population. Hospitals have been looted and health personnel have fled their posts.

A health assessment by the World Health Organization and other agencies between June and August, which is before the last escalation of violence, found pockets of severe malnutrition and low immunization.

The security situation makes providing health care much more difficult. As of December, more than 50% of health units had been vandalized and looted.

The NGOs tell us they need help with transportation and materials.

Again, I ask the government, what more can it do to help the NGOs provide health care on the ground?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am sure that my colleague recognizes that Canada is providing financial support to UNICEF in order to respond to the need for water, sanitation, health care, nutrition, education, protection in emergency situations, and basic items. At the start of her remarks, my colleague said that she had 20 years' experience in that organization. Could she explain how UNICEF workers are bringing care, comfort and assistance to the population?

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Chair, the member asked about children, so I will talk about the schooling of children.

All schools in Bangui have been closed since early December 2013. As soon as security allows it, the safe and permanent return of

all teachers and students to schools will be a crucial step on the road to peace and reconciliation. It is urgent for children to get access to a place where they can learn safely. Returning to class gives children a sense of normalcy and stability.

The basic right to education is most at risk during times of crisis. Over the past year, 65% of 176 schools across the country have been looted, according to UNICEF.

UNICEF's appeal for emergency operations in the Central African Republic this year is for \$62 million. The current funding shortfall is \$52 million.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Chair, I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the Central African Republic, a country of 4.6 million people, during this difficult juncture in the country's history. Let me provide some context.

The roots of the current conflict can be found in that country's troubled past, a country that has endured multiple military coups and dictatorships since it gained independence in 1960.

While its past has been troubled, previous conflicts did not have a religious component in a country where, according to the 2003 census, over 80% of the population are Christians, although many practise in their local animist beliefs, and 15% are Muslim. Historically, there have been conflicts over natural resources and land between a largely sedentary Christian population and largely nomadic Muslim population, but not over religious beliefs.

Unfortunately, the present conflict has become increasingly sectarian in nature with both communities gripped by a cycle of fear and retribution. How did it get to this point?

In March 2013, the government of François Bozizé was overthrown by a loose coalition of rebels known as Séléka, which originated in the CAR majority Muslim northeastern region. Séléka had accused President Bozizé of not abiding by peace agreements signed in 2007 and 2011. While most Séléka members were Muslim, about 10% of the members were non-Muslim.

When François Bozizé, who himself had come to power in a 2003 coup, fled the country, secular leader Michel Djotodia became interim president in March 2003 and the first Muslim to lead the CAR. However, there were already tensions within the Séléka, with some members originating from Chad and Sudan who did not speak the local dialect and who appeared to have used their position for self-enrichment at the expense of the communities they came to control.

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Furthermore, Séléka actively recruited children. Members of this group were responsible for atrocities against villagers during the lead-up to the overthrow of François Bozizé which created tension within many communities in the CAR.

Meanwhile, Séléka fighters, sometimes in co-operation with nomadic pastoralists, attacked, pillaged and intentionally destroyed villages, many of whose populations were mainly Christian.

In August 2013, as the violence spread and refugees came across the CAR into neighbouring countries, the UN Security Council warned the Central African Republic posed a serious threat to regional stability.

Michel Djotodia, unable to control the various factions of Séléka, dissolved the group in September 2013. This was not the end of the troubles and matters quickly took a turn for the worse.

Most of the former members of Séléka refused to disarm and became increasingly violent. From mid-September 2013 there were growing numbers of reports of killing, rape and looting in the Central African Republic.

Into this chaotic and ungoverned context self-defence groups sprang up to defend local communities as well as settle old scores. These self-defence groups, known as anti-balaka, or anti-machete, militias were predominantly Christian. When these Christian militias attacked innocent Muslim communities in retaliation for earlier attacks by Séléka, ex-Séléka groups attacked more Christian communities in revenge, prompting another cycle of reprisals. Rapidly, the conflict became sectarian in nature.

Meanwhile, during the tenure of Séléka leader Michel Djotodia, the government institutions collapsed. Outside the capital, Bangui, basic services such as health and education were almost non-existent. In January 2014, as the country continued to fall into chaos, Michel Djotodia resigned under strong international pressure.

The National Transition Council elected a new interim president, Catherine Samba-Panza, who was the mayor of Bangui. She has stated she will abide by the road map adopted by countries of the Economic Community of Central African States and the NTC, including having elections as soon as feasible, as well as committing to reconciliation and to re-establishing security and state authority over all Central African Republic territory.

We must ask what the implications of the current chaos and violence in the CAR are.

Today, some 825,000 Central Africans, almost 20% of the country's population, are internally displaced, and over 86,000 Central Africans have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries.

Violence continues and there are reports that there is a steady stream of dead from intercommunal violence, punctuated by larger massacres where 500 or more people may have been killed.

• (2045)

Due to ongoing violence and the difficulty of accessing large swaths of the country, the true scale of the number of dead will likely only become clearer once a degree of stability has been restored. Meanwhile, people are seeking refuge in places of worship, which are no longer safe, or are hiding in the bush.

There are many real implications for regional security because of the current conflict in the CAR. The growing number of refugees has the potential to destabilize neighbouring countries where the governments have limited capacity to respond and address their needs. Some of these countries are already dealing with large numbers of internally displaced people due to their own internal conflicts. Refugee populations will likely put additional pressure on scarce resources in these contexts, raising the potential for increased tensions in isolated areas where governments in the region have a weaker presence.

Furthermore, the security vacuum in the Central African Republic could be used as a safe haven for armed groups active in neighbouring countries, such as armed opponents of the government of Chad operating in the CAR as well as the Lord's Resistance Army, a group notorious for recruiting children and for slaughtering civilians. The LRA is currently active in the southeastern region of the CAR and in northern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Meanwhile, criminal networks are actively smuggling diamonds, gold, timber, and ivory out of CAR. Some of the profits are potentially being used to sponsor armed and terrorist groups in Africa and beyond.

It is therefore imperative that the interim government of Catherine Samba-Panza be able to stabilize the situation and regain control of the country. The international community is taking active steps to help the Central African Republic. While the CAR used to be described as the forgotten crisis, the international community is now responding.

On December 11, 2013, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, an inter-agency forum of UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, declared the CAR a level three emergency, the highest level of international humanitarian response. It is the same level as Syria.

Furthermore, on December 5, 2013, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2127, which provided for an African Union force in the CAR, known as MISCA, to protect civilians and stabilize the country.

On January 28, the UN Security Council unanimously approved resolution 2134 on the CAR, which authorized the deployment of European Union troops to that country and allowed them to use all necessary measures to protect its civilians.

On December 15, Canada announced that it was contributing \$5 million toward the UN trust fund for the MISCA mission. Over the course of 2013, Canada has contributed \$6.95 million in humanitarian assistance. Just yesterday, on February 11, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie announced an additional contribution of \$5 million from Canada to address the dire humanitarian needs of the people affected by conflict in the CAR.

Canada continues to provide humanitarian assistance and to work with our allies on how best to address the conflict and stem the ongoing violence in the Central African Republic. We will continue to work with the international community in efforts to address the humanitarian needs of the people of the Central African Republic and to help bring stability to the region.

Government Orders

• (2050)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, my colleague gave a good overview of what has been happening in the Central African Republic.

Last November, my colleagues and I put out a press release encouraging the government to engage. We wanted Canada to support the actions of the UN, particularly in allowing the European Union to have some security support on the ground.

My colleague enumerated the aid the government committed to in December and yesterday, as well. I want to acknowledge that support.

Back in November we also wanted to support what was happening at the UN. We have now seen that come to fruition.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell us if we are looking at diplomatic support and military support on the ground for the EU mission? Is that conversation happening? If not, why not?

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I was at the Addis Ababa African Union summit about two weeks ago. As the member knows, Canada is working with its allies. We feel that the African Union may be the key player in supporting them in addressing this issue.

The African Union, just after the meeting of the heads of state, had a meeting on the Central African Republic and how to address the issue. Arising from that, in conversation with our allies, in this case the European Union, as the hon. member mentioned, which will send an additional 500 people, they asked what kind of assistance we can give. Canada, of course, yesterday announced \$5 million to maintain assistance. We also originally gave money to help the African Union forces in that country.

We are, of course, very concerned that violence is still going on there. The interim president is working very hard.

As I outlined, if the events taking place in the Central African Republic are not solved very quickly, they will have a very unstable regional influence in central Africa.

• (2055)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments.

I will talk about something the Minister of International Development said in his speech and ask for his thoughts on this. It is the fact that the minister spoke about the importance of having safety corridors so that humanitarian aid could get through to those most in need of it. Somebody else spoke more recently about the fact that those who are delivering humanitarian aid are also in need of protection, because they are in a very dangerous place.

We know that the situation is deteriorating rapidly when we start hearing things like “ethnic cleansing” and when we start hearing about the atrocities committed on children. We know this is a very dangerous place.

There are 5,500 African troops. There are 1,600 French troops, and the European Union has recently announced 500 new troops. Is the government considering the possibility of Canada also making a contribution in terms of troops to help ensure the safety of those

corridors so that the humanitarian aid Canada and other countries is delivering has a greater chance of reaching its destination?

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I absolutely agree with the member. We need these corridors because of the violent situation. We need to provide all the assistance we are sending, and it has to reach the people. The security corridors are very important to provide access to the people who need aid.

One of the policies Canada has had for a while is building capacity in the African Union to look after conflicts in Africa. During my recent visit to the African Union summit, the African nations were willing. They accept that it is their responsibility to ensure that.

What they are looking for from us is the kind of support the hon. member was also talking about, such as logistics support, which Canada provided in South Sudan. We did not send troops, but we provided logistics support for the African Union forces that were in Nigeria. The Liberal government at that time provided the armoured vehicles for the Darfur area.

Canada is providing capacity-building. We announced \$5 million to help the African Union troops with capacity-building and the logistics of setting up that corridor. We feel that it is one of the best things for Canada to do. We will work with the international community, the European Union, and the United Nations in that respect. We will respond to the situation, as we did yesterday.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, this is obviously a very tragic situation, a humanitarian crisis, but as Médecins Sans Frontières said, this is the kind of situation where intervention can make a difference. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is saying that the international response is not commensurate with the threat.

I know that Canada has provided logistical support and financing to the African Union, but for UN peacekeeping, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we were asked several times to send two or three or four particularly high-level, strategic, well-skilled people at the level of general to assist the African Union, and we said no.

In the circumstances that are now accelerating, with the momentum in the wrong direction, toward a potential genocide, particularly of the Muslim population, but the Christian population is also very much at risk in this country, would Canada be prepared to assist, if asked, and actually send troops to assist a multilateral effort to keep the peace and save lives under the doctrine of responsibility to protect?

• (2100)

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, as I stated in my speech, the United Nations and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon have already said that this is a serious crisis. If and when the United Nations calls for any kind of assistance, Canada is prepared to see what it can provide as the best assistance.

Government Orders

Let me correct the hon. member. I was in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Canada did provide the logistics support to the United Nations that was required by the troops out there. We will do that if the United Nations requests it, when we will see what kind of assistance we can best provide. There is no point sending people. What are we good at? That is what we are good at. We have done it in the past. We are building the capacity of the African Union's peacekeeping forces. We have contributed to setting up the peacekeeping forces so that the Africans can do what they have always demanded, which is to take control of their own continent and look after their own crises. We are there to help them, and that is what Canada will continue to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for the historical overview he began with. If we manage to understand the chronology of the events before the conflict began, are we able to determine what led to the conflict and where the point of no return is situated, or is it still too soon at the moment?

[*English*]

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, the history of that country has been military coups and dictatorships. When Mr. Bozizé, who was the last to come to power, was overthrown, it changed from coups to a religious war. Prior to that, it was not a religious war. As has been alluded to by many speakers, the Christians and Muslims lived together. However, it was after his government was overthrown that the first Muslim militia came in, the Séléka, which brought a religious war context into this conflict, which is now the most serious one that has taken place.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I rise to contribute to our take note debate on the Central African Republic. I do it with very mixed emotions. Part of it is a lot of sadness and concern, and a bit of anger, frankly. I will explain that in a minute. However, there is also some hope that we can actually look at putting together some ideas tonight to recommend to the government.

The sadness is just what we have heard tonight. We heard of the horrific displacement of people, the disappearance of people, the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and the descent into chaos. What used to be a place of some stability has become a place where people are now being questioned about their religious affiliation, which can lead to their death. That is why we hear today from Amnesty International its concerns about ethnic cleansing, as has been referenced a number of times, and that the seeds of genocide are there.

I was researching earlier and found that a female Nobel Prize laureate has documented over 1,100 confirmed cases of sexual violence, and I am sure there are many more. That is a very disturbing trend, where armed groups and people are using sexual violence as a weapon of war.

That obviously leads to sadness and, frankly, some anger at times. We have heard this stated in the House tonight and heard it before, where people talk about previous genocides. We talk about what happened 20 years ago. We will be commemorating what happened in Rwanda coming up in April, and there is Bosnia. We could go

through a whole list. We look at the situation and ask why we are here again.

Someone I well respect, an expert on Africa and on genocide prevention, has claimed that if someone says "never again", just look at them and say "prove it". He goes so far as to say that if anyone tells us never again, walk away from them because they are frankly lying. It is because we see the history in front of us.

We have to take that seriously because we have the UN declarations that we have signed onto. We have the declaration on the prevention of genocide. We have tried to come up with systems to address this, yet what do we have? We have a situation in Central African Republic where the UN has stated its highest level of concern.

There is another thread to this that we have not really discussed tonight. It is the fact that this is in Africa and there seems to be a systemic, kind of racist approach to it. I do not accuse anyone in the House at all, of course. It is about the world's response often. I have found, and I am sure others feel the same way, that when it comes to the Congo, where we have seen 5.4 million die in that conflict since 1998, there seems to be disinterest from the world community. We have to wonder if it is just about the value of the lives of the people we are talking about. Is it because we do not value their lives as much as we do others'?

Therefore, I do find myself becoming angry, but that does not get us anywhere and it certainly does not help the people in the Central African Republic. What does help is looking at concrete solutions. I did acknowledge the government's aid to date, which is important to do. It is also important to acknowledge what other countries have done. I was just talking about the EU in my question to the parliamentary secretary. We were seeing before Christmas that something was going to happen at the United Nations to allow for some sort of stabilization force.

Let me recommend to the government the following, that we be actively engaged and offer our logistical support, as acknowledged by the government and the parliamentary secretary just minutes ago, and also our support in terms of people power, where we could help provide training, be it on the ground or adjacent, and help the African Union.

• (2105)

The parliamentary secretary was just talking about the Congo, where I was a number of years ago. There was a need there for some of our officer corps, who are trained in peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Of course, we had the language capability, which was incredibly important. When we see who is on the ground, we often find a lack of coherence because of communication issues. I put that to government as an idea to actively engage in this file, as well as by providing the support already mentioned.

Certainly with the EU and African Union, I am sure there would be a take on that and the need to provide more logistical and communications support and, if needed, some training for some of the people who are on the ground. I know that the Rwandans, for instance, are on the ground there. Can we help with training their peacekeepers?

Government Orders

It seems, after we hear reports from Amnesty and others, that the needed stabilization is not there.

The parliamentary secretary gave a fairly good resumé of the history. I would just like to go back about a year, when there was a peace accord. This is important to note. Of course, it did not hold, and we understand that.

At the time, there were warnings. This is very important for this debate tonight. There were warnings at the time of the peace accord and there were warnings from rebels who said that if it were not fulfilled, there would not be peace but conflict. Sure enough, that is what happened.

As has already been mentioned, we had, shall we say, an amalgam of the rebels at the time who were influenced by different countries. We often see these accords passed, and then everyone walks away and says “done”. We have to learn the lesson. Say yes to stabilization now. Say yes to pouring resources in now. Say yes to dealing with the conflict immediately to save lives, because we are talking about potential genocide.

Let us not forget, though, that Sudan as a case scenario. I think of Darfur is a case scenario. I think of what happened in Mali as a case scenario. Definitely in the CAR, though, a year ago in January, when people thought that the peace accord was done, there were warnings at the time of the potential for it to descend into chaos, as we now see. That is very important.

Another recommendation I have for the government is to do what other countries have done and assign someone to be a focal point on R2P. I say that as someone who understands how that could be a challenge for government, but it does not have to be.

In 2010, a number of countries, including Australia, Denmark and Costa Rica, came together to look at having a focal point for the idea of prevention of mass atrocities. Many other countries joined after that. We have a whole list. There is Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, the Czech Republic, the D.R.C., Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, the U.K. They have all appointed someone to be a focal point for R2P, basically for the prevention of mass atrocities.

We do not need someone who is just going to study things. We need to have someone who is going to look at these situations in real-time for prevention and to make sure that we understand the warning signs, which we saw a year ago, and what we need to do to further stabilize situations.

Let me finish by saying the following, which has not been mentioned. In the town of Yaloké, there were 30,000 Muslims. It was a bustling town that mainly dealt in the gold trade. That number has now been reduced to 500 Muslims. Where there were eight mosques, there is now one. When we talk about the seeds of genocide and ethnic cleansing, that is what we are talking about. People have either been removed or they have left.

We have to deal with this. We have to work together, regardless of our party. We must have our country do some of the things I just mentioned. I look forward to a discussion with other members of Parliament on this issue.

● (2110)

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC):

Mr. Chair, I of course want to thank my colleague on the other side who has been a foreign affairs critic for a long time and knows the issues very well.

He put forward two suggestions about providing capacity-building support for the African Union's peacekeeping forces. I want to say to my hon. colleague that Canada is working with African countries to build their capacity and train them, as he has rightly pointed out, and to do so beforehand so they can take over and not have a situation where the forces going into the area, in this case the Central African Republic, have no training.

They are looking at building the one peacekeeping centre in Tanzania and one in West Africa where Canada will provide the support necessary for the African Union, which is now very much interested, after many years, to be taking over the peacekeeping efforts in its own continent. So yes it is a work in progress as you said.

To your second suggestion, absolutely, I do not see anything wrong in being preventive. You are right. When there are—

The Deputy Chair: Order, please. I have two comments: first, if the hon. member could wrap up, and second, if he could direct his comments to the Chair rather than his colleague.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, the second point that he did mention, which has great merit, concerned conflict prevention. That is excellent. We do not want to see atrocities taking place, as everyone is saying here.

So yes, those are very good points.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, this is where I would like to see government act. One of the challenges we have is money, as the member knows, and one of the challenges we had this past year was after the government decided to discontinue START as a program and a foundation for Foreign Affairs to be able to engage in conflict resolution and prevention. That wrapped up and we had the money lapse. So I am hoping that the Conservatives understand that we really have to get in the game.

Let me finish by saying that this idea of having a focal point is important, but I really have to underline the notion of the capacity the member is talking about in Tanzania and West Africa and creating the capacity within Africa. It is absolutely critical, but we can send and hopefully provide for that mentorship and support as well by doing a bit more, frankly.

And finally, I would say that when we look at prevention, which is absolutely what we have signed onto through the UN, we all need to do a lot more, and the case of CAR suggests that. As I said before, it is hard not to think of this as just some form of institutional, systemic racism when we look at our not paying as much attention to what is happening in these humanitarian crises in Africa. I call on all of us to do a lot more when it comes to these situations.

Government Orders

● (2115)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as my hon. colleague and others have pointed out, insecurity remains a huge issue.

French and African Union forces must disarm all armed groups who threaten civilians. Urgent protection is needed for vulnerable civilians in Bangui and other areas, particularly in the northwest. French and African Union forces must ensure that encampments of internally displaced persons are adequately protected.

Does the member think that donors should urgently provide financial and logistical support to the African Union to ensure that MISCA has the necessary resources to fulfill its mandate? And should additional support be provided to the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic to ensure that it has adequate protection and necessary resources to fulfill its mandate?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for the question because I was going to add this into my speech earlier.

One of the issues around resilience and support is that what we had before, and since July 2013, was the integrated peace-building capacity. Clearly, it needs further support, and I go back to my comments earlier about how we can be a more activist country when it comes to developing and innovating in peace building, peace-keeping, and prevention of mass atrocities.

The focal point is something I put out as an idea, as well as helping to train and help with these capacities. Also, in looking very closely at resolution 1325, to which we have signed on, we see that the government has an action plan to involve women, in particular, on peace building; however, we must stay with it, because once the conflict has subsided we cannot say, “Okay, done”. That should be the lesson of CAR. That is what people thought a year ago after there was a peace accord, and look at where we are now.

So, yes, we need to do those investments, but we have to be actively engaged. That is why I believe we have to have an activist foreign policy when it comes to this issue, particularly on prevention of mass atrocities.

As I said, it is hard to look anyone in the eye and say, “Never again” with honesty because it is happening again and again. That causes us all to reflect on what we can do to help.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague for his very interesting speech, and especially for the conflict prevention points he raised. There are many different ways to prevent conflict, such as promoting dialogue, respecting human rights and the rule of law and combating regional and social inequality. Those are long-term approaches to preventing conflict.

I would like to ask him a specific question. My colleague talked about the responsibility to protect. According to that responsibility, the international community must intervene when a government is attacking its own citizens or is unable to protect them.

Does my colleague believe that this is an example of a time when the responsibility to protect, commonly known as “R2P”, applies?

● (2120)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for that question because we really need to understand what that term means. It is why I think the focal point is a starting point, which other countries have done.

Look at the countries that started, in 2010, to have a focal point on R2P: Australia, Costa Rica, Denmark. They decided that smaller powers have a critical role to play and the diplomatic aspect of it is absolutely essential.

If we now can predict these mass atrocities, and we can, then what are we going to do? I guess that is where we have to come up with a better list of options to engage.

When we look at CAR, we see it is a classic case where, if we had understood a year ago and earlier the fact that there was not engagement in health, education, and diplomatic support and monitoring, and had we ensured that there was not going to be negligence from the nascent actors on this accord, then perhaps we would not have seen this.

This is why prevention has to be the primary mandate for us. It is why diplomacy and engagement are so important, as well as working with other countries like Canada who can provide that assistance and—let us be honest—that legitimacy. We do not have that threat of taking over a country, that colonial past, and we need to use that to our advantage.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have the opportunity to tell the House about Canada's humanitarian assistance funding to the Central African Republic, also referred to as CAR.

For the past year, this small landlocked country, situated between Cameroon, Chad, and South Sudan, has been struggling to cope with a full-scale humanitarian crisis. It has affected the entire population of the country, all 4.6 million Central Africans, and yet very few people know that the crisis even exists.

While the civil war in Syria and the recent typhoon in the Philippines have dominated headlines around the world, the situation in CAR has garnered little attention. Some experts have even labelled it a forgotten crisis. This is unfortunate, as the lack of coverage is egregiously disproportionate to the severity of the situation on the ground.

Government Orders

Let me provide some context. The CAR has been plagued by underdevelopment, political instability, and intermittent conflict since its independence from France in 1960. From an already fragile situation with significant needs, things took a turn for the worse last year. A long-simmering conflict between different social and political factions escalated last March when a rebel coalition named Séléka overthrew CAR's president and seized control of the country's capital.

Since then, armed groups have pillaged nearly the entire country and terrorized local communities. There have been widespread and increasing reports of looting, extortion, arbitrary arrests, torture, executions, sexual violence, and child recruitment.

Looting of health facilities and other public buildings, as well as the closure of schools and government offices, have deprived people of access to basic services. As of early January, out of all of those affected, 2.5 million people, more than half the population, were in need of immediate assistance.

More than 68,000 Central Africans have become refugees over the last 12 months, most of them crossing into neighbouring countries with what they could carry on their backs.

International humanitarian agencies and local aid groups have been striving to scale up their responses to meet the escalating needs, but the task is enormous. The operating bases of aid agencies have been looted and pillaged, and some aid workers have been directly targeted by armed groups. The insecurity is impeding the transportation of supplies into the country, as well as their distribution in remote areas.

Despite the deployment of African and other international troops, new outbreaks of violence have been reported in the northwestern and southern regions of the country.

International humanitarian assistance is a priority for the Government of Canada. It always has been. We are committed to providing humanitarian assistance wherever and whenever needed in a timely and equitable way. Media coverage is not a determining factor; only the lives at stake. That is why Canada is responding through experienced humanitarian agencies to assist the Central African people affected by this crisis.

In fact, Canada is not a new humanitarian donor to the CAR. We have been providing humanitarian assistance there for many years. Circumstances called for great measures, and so last year our government more than doubled our humanitarian assistance from what we provided in 2012.

To date, our government has provided more than \$6.95 million to address the needs of the most vulnerable, particularly women and children, affected by this crisis.

In July 2013, Canada's Minister of International Development announced \$6.2 million in humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs in CAR in 2013. This assistance includes \$2 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross, \$1 million to the United Nations Children's Fund, \$1.5 million to Doctors Without Borders, and \$1.7 million to the United Nations World Food Programme.

Yesterday, the hon. Minister of International Development also announced \$5 million in new humanitarian assistance funding to the

Central African Republic. This new assistance, announced only a few weeks after international appeals for this crisis were launched, reflects Canada's commitment to timely lifesaving humanitarian responses.

• (2125)

Our government's robust response to the situation in the CAR is consistent with Canada's reputation as a compassionate and generous nation that helps vulnerable people in times of need. In 2012-13 alone, Canada responded to 32 natural disasters and provided assistance to alleviate crises in 37 countries around the world. Canadians are proud of this track record.

As a people, Canadians have always understood our responsibility to contribute during times of need. We do so not to make ourselves look good in the eyes of our friends, our fellow citizens, or even the eyes of the world; we contribute because it is the right thing to do, and compassion is a value that has driven our great country for generations. When countries are overcome by disaster or overwhelmed by conflict, we respond, providing assistance in the most timely, efficient way possible, so people are fed, sheltered, and protected from harm, often in the face of unthinkable circumstances.

The new amalgamation of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development provides opportunities to further enhance the way our government responds to crisis. Canada's recent heroic response to the crisis in the Philippines as a result of Typhoon Haiyan is an example of the benefits of a well-coordinated DFATD and what we are capable of doing with a whole-of-government approach.

However, beyond amalgamation, we must continue doing three things, in particular, if we are to improve our humanitarian responses in increasingly complex environments like the CAR. First, as emphasized by the Minister of International Development in his speech at the Canadian humanitarian conference in October, Canada will continue to stress the impartiality, neutrality, and independence of its humanitarian partners. Upholding these principles is critical for ensuring that vulnerable people have access to assistance. It is also critical for ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

Second, we must continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system in order to improve results on the ground. Canada has been the leading voice in support of reforms to the humanitarian system globally, which are currently under way.

Last but not least, transparency and accountability must remain at the centre of our efforts. We need to place greater emphasis on the achievement of results, including a better understanding of our overall impact. It is in this spirit of responding to our humanitarian commitments and in support of humanitarian principles that our government has responded to the crisis in the CAR.

As the situation evolves, our government will continue to monitor events closely and respond as needs arise. On December 15, 2013, the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that Canada would contribute \$5 million to the UN-mandated trust fund to support the international mission led by the African Union in the CAR. Canadians can be proud of our response to the people of the CAR during this terrible time. Experts may have dubbed this a forgotten crisis, but it has not been forgotten by Canada.

Government Orders

• (2130)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her speech.

The situation is clearly very serious. This conflict, like so many others in Africa, has been characterized by killings. We know that women and children are the primary targets; they are vulnerable targets.

My colleague talked about compassion, but as the member for Ottawa suggested, does she think that, above all, we have to prevent these situations? There is no doubt that when it comes to taking action, we have very limited means.

Does she think that prevention would be a more useful and effective way to avoid this kind of conflict?

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, first let me say that I do not think that there can be anybody in this House who is more concerned about the health of countries in Africa than I am. I have a son-in-law who is African and my daughter and son-in-law are currently living in Africa, where my son-in-law is a professor at a university and my daughter is teaching grades 4 to 6 English, so the health of African countries is absolutely part of who I am, and part of my family is African.

We need to look at all of these things in order to prevent these kinds of crises, the very reason our government has focused our international development on predicting and preventing. We want to see, first of all, secure food for people around those countries; secure futures for children and youth; and secure economic development, because we know that when those things are secure, there will be a whole lot less conflict over the issues in Africa.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Chair, given that my colleague has a strong personal attachment to Africa and given that this is a country that is literally tearing itself apart at this time, when unspeakable atrocities are being committed and when we bear in mind that last year over \$300 million of the government's money for international aid and development lapsed because it was not spent, can she truly argue that, to use her words, Canada has responded robustly to the problem that exists in the Central African Republic? Can she really say this has been a robust response, given all the things she said in her speech?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, it would be just like the opposition to throw money at problems without a plan. Our government has been very focused on helping African countries. In fact, half of our development money goes into Africa. We doubled the aid to Africa over what my colleagues in the Liberal Party had given, and, most importantly, we untied that aid, unlike my Liberal colleagues across the way.

We have a very focused agenda on development in these countries. As I said, secure food is absolutely essential. Secure futures for children and youth are absolutely essential. We are pouring money into maternal, newborn, and child health initiatives across Africa.

I would invite my colleagues to take a look at a report by the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Mortality in Africa, the "Good Practices Report 2013". CAR is one of countries on that scoreboard. From all of those scoreboards, we are seeing a reduction in infant mortality and a reduction in the numbers of moms who are losing their lives in childbirth. We are doing the right thing and we will continue to do so.

• (2135)

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Chair, my colleague mentioned in her speech the \$6.95 million that was contributed to support humanitarian organizations in 2013. She also mentioned the \$5 million that was announced just yesterday by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. She could have mentioned also that it has been \$25 million since 2007.

This is a terrible conflict. I know my colleague has been to Africa many times and has a deep affection for that continent. I think she would agree that it is a welcome development in this conflict that the African Union is leading some of the efforts to stabilize the situation to protect civilians especially.

I wonder if she would comment about the contributions Canada is making when it comes to enhancing the capabilities of member nations in the African Union. I think it is really important that we get beyond food, health care, and education, some of the basic things. Ultimately, to have some stable countries in Africa, they are going to have to have some capabilities when it comes to their justice systems and their defence systems and so on.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for that question, because one of the development issues that we focus on is indeed capacity-building. One of the great needs in Africa is potable water and sanitation. We work with many of the African countries on seeing those systems implemented. Diarrheal deaths for children are one of the greatest catastrophes in the world. We need to know that these African countries are building their capacity and ensuring safe water systems alone.

We are working with countries on their elections. When I was in Benin, we spoke with the elections department in that country. They are moving forward in putting together free and fair elections. Many of these countries have a long way to go, but we want to see them build those capacities and we want to be part of that because Canada has a great reputation in Africa.

My son-in-law's brother works for the United Nations department for the AIDS initiatives in 14 of the African countries, and when I speak with Ben, he tells me that the reputation of Canada on the ground is that the people in Africa know that when Canada says that it will make a contribution, Canada steps up to the plate.

I know there was a question in the House earlier about whether or not the money that has been promised by this government is going to be available and when it is going to be available. I am very proud to stand in the House and say that when Canada makes a promise, our government keeps that promise, and the money is available to those initiatives immediately.

We call on other countries to pay what they pledge because it is only by paying what we pledge that we are going to be able to see these countries move forward with capacity-building and developing their health care systems. We are seeing continued drops in mortality rates for children.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, this is a very important debate. I think everyone on all sides of the House recognizes that there is a humanitarian crisis with a potential for looming genocide. However, a lot of Canadians hear this kind of language very often about different countries about which they know very little, and it tends to create the impression that we have a situation that is beyond help—that Canadians can throw humanitarian aid, but it will not make a difference.

I want to personalize it. To my hon. colleague, who is a friend and also a woman in political life, let us focus on the opportunity right now. Since January 23, this besieged country has one of the few women presidents in Africa right now. Catherine Samba-Panza, who represents a voice calling for non-violence, is calling for her people—she calls them her children, while they are calling her “Mother Courage”—to lay down their arms. She is asking the UN for help. She is asking the world for help.

This is not a situation in which, as is so often tragically the case, we have a deranged, despotic leadership and people torn by sectarian violence. We have sectarian violence on the ground, but we have a president of the Central African Republic who is asking us for help. It is a very specific woman who has only been in power since January 23, less than a month.

What can Canada do beyond what we have done now? If asked, what can we do to ensure the success and the restoration of peace, security, and a healthy civil society in CAR?

• (2140)

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for that question because it gives me the opportunity to recognize many of the women in Africa who are taking their positions in places of leadership across that continent.

I was in Malawi last January with the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association. Joyce Banda is the president of that country. I was in Mozambique speaking at a conference for the African Minerals Development Centre where Minister Bias, who is the minister of mines for the country of Mozambique, has taken a very strong leadership on the issues of regulation and legislation for African minerals.

These women are stepping up. I have met many women in critical positions in Africa, and we encourage them as women to take their place on the world stage in these places of political life.

We know that the president of CAR is facing a very difficult situation right now. Canada is going to continue to be there. We will continue to assess the situation and watch as the needs unfold. Canada will continue to help.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP) Mr. Chair, I must begin by saying that, as someone who has worked internationally for almost 25 years, including with

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the United Nations and the Organization of American States, I am pleased to contribute to this evening's debate.

In addition, as a new member and vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity, I am pleased to speak to the issue this evening.

When I rise in the House, it is always an honour for me to be able to at least try to contribute to all the debates that we hold here. The topic of this evening's debate saddens me a great deal. I rise sadly, but also with what I might call some nostalgia. Indeed, there was a time when our country, Canada, had great credibility and great influence on the international scene, in conflicts of all kinds. We have lost a little of that credibility over the years, especially in recent years.

If we look back over the last 20 years, perhaps even further back, and we consider all the crises that we have seen since, the list is so long that the 10 minutes I have been granted would not be sufficient to allow me to read it.

First, I am simply going to go back to some points that we have raised in this debate. Clearly, our party strongly supports the people of the Central African Republic in this crisis. Our thoughts are with the population as a whole and with all those who have fallen victim since it all started. We are also deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis and the violence that are ravaging the country, as is the United Nations Security Council.

We need to remember that our concern is indeed shared by the United Nations Security Council. In the fifth paragraph of the preamble of its resolution 2127, the Security Council underlines:

...its particular concern at the new dynamic of violence and retaliation and the risk of it degenerating into a countrywide religious and ethnic divide, [and this is the important part] with the potential to spiral into an uncontrollable situation, including serious crimes under international law, in particular war crimes and crimes against humanity...

That is a concern that we share with the United Nations Security Council. It bears repeating given the context of this debate.

It makes sense for the opposition parties and the parties present in the House to draw attention to some of Canada's obligations as a member of the United Nations.

Every member country has a number of obligations under the United Nations charter. International co-operation is one of the cornerstones of the United Nations charter. It is such a basic obligation that we sometimes forget about it. We need to work with other countries during these types of crises, and that is what we are urging the government to do with this debate tonight and in the days to come.

Our credibility on the international stage and the influence we used to have with other members of the United Nations have eroded somewhat over the years. The action we take with regard to this conflict can help us restore that.

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• (2145)

Much has been said about the need for prevention. Our international network allows us to take preventive measures, which are important around the globe. Where there are risks, it is easy to see them coming.

Before coming to Parliament Hill, I took a quick look at previous reports from the human rights commission and the human rights committee. These are two separate authorities that have different roles to play given their respective mandates. I noted that the human rights committee began criticizing the CAR in 2006 for not submitting its periodic reports, as is required of countries that sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

According to article 40 of this covenant, a periodic report must be submitted to the human rights committee every four or five years. The committee must verify whether the country that signs the human rights covenant is respecting the rights set out in the covenant and how it is doing so. Therefore, the country must submit periodic reports.

Beginning in 2006, the Central African Republic was being chastised for not fulfilling its obligations under article 40. Anyone who looked at previous reports would have seen signs of the country's attitude toward human rights in general. There were warnings. That is the beauty of our international human rights system. Tools are in place to warn us about the kind of crisis we are talking about tonight.

Again, we are asking the government to provide additional emergency humanitarian aid and to direct that aid to the most effective and experienced humanitarian organizations on the ground. That goes without saying. The experts on the ground are familiar with the local situations. They are usually in the best position to help these people.

I hardly need to remind everyone that the crisis in the Central African Republic is a level three humanitarian emergency. Other members pointed that out earlier. This is serious. There are two other level three situations going on right now: the Philippines and Syria.

I have just a minute left, but I want to emphasize that we need to take immediate action on this issue. This conflict is affecting 4.6 million people, 2.3 million of them children. It has displaced more than 820,000 people and caused 256,000 refugees to flee the Central African Republic. Those are huge numbers. Such a long list tells us that the crisis is severe and the need for action is immediate.

• (2150)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the debate seems to be now focusing on prevention. As his colleague, the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, pointed out, in the case of the Central African Republic, we were not able to prevent this conflict.

Now, the entire population is threatened and we have a duty to intervene. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs rightly said, if there is to be any progress, some degree of stability needs to be restored first. I am part of the same committee for the prevention of genocide as my colleague, and this is a timely issue.

What measures would my colleague like to see from the Government of Canada to help prevent such a situation and prevent a massacre like the one that happened in Rwanda in 1994?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his very important and very troubling question. When the United Nations Security Council takes the trouble to point out in its resolution that this is the direction we seem to be heading in and that we have already seen this in the past two decades, I think it is important to take action.

First of all, as we have emphasized many times here, Canada must continue doing what it does best: helping on the ground with humanitarian assistance, in co-operation with non-governmental organizations that are experts in this area. I think we need to continue this co-operation that must exist between the Canadian government and those organizations. This partnership has always proven effective, I believe, and this co-operation must continue.

I would like to point out another important part of his question, namely the international co-operation that is always needed in any crisis, not just in the one we are discussing here this evening. In any crisis, international co-operation is the shared responsibility of all member nations under the United Nations charter, as I mentioned, and this must continue.

• (2155)

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Chair, as I was saying, I have been in touch with Central African nationals. I feel I was given a mandate by those people, who shared their concerns and hopes with me. They live in hope despite the great hardships experienced by their country and their loved ones who are still in the Central African Republic. They are still hoping for a solution that might bring peace. The thing that struck me is that when they approached me, they felt that Canada still had considerable moral authority to intervene in this part of Africa.

I would like my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou to rely on his experience to give me an assessment of this moral authority and tell me whether it is strong enough to do more than just provide financial aid.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for his question. He raises a very important point that very few people have talked about this evening: there seems to be little reaction when an African country is involved.

There is a very strong reaction when this happens elsewhere. However, when it happens in Africa, we seem to react differently. Like my colleague from Ottawa Centre, I am shocked to see this. It makes me sad. I know that I represent a riding that is quite removed from all of this. I am referring to the far north, the Arctic. Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is very different from Africa, not just in terms of the climate, but in many other respects. I know that we must always have a moral obligation when it comes to this type of situation. It may not be very evident because we are concerned with many other things it seems. There again, I would like to reiterate that it is rather shocking that when this situation occurs in an African country it elicits less of a response.

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[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as has been mentioned, some 2.3 million children are affected by this conflict, with nearly half a million children displaced by violence in the past year. Many are hiding in the forests with little or no access to basic service or assistance. Schools across the country are closed, health clinics ransacked, and water systems destroyed. The rainy season beginning in March will exacerbate an already precarious humanitarian situation for hundreds of thousands of people living in internally displaced sites across the country.

Does the member think that children should be the focus of greater investment if there is to be any chance of rebuilding the health, education and community systems that protect and nurture children? Again, \$5 million is not enough.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her question. I think she has raised a crucial point in this debate.

I would humbly say that children are very important. Children play a very central role in society, according to the traditions of my culture. I think that is an important aspect on which we should focus. Atrocities are being committed against women and, more specifically, young women. We must make a serious effort to put an end to that.

Canada has experience with democratic reform, the democratization of society and democratic elections. We have been living proof of that experience for a long time, although we may have lost our humanitarian touch. I would like us to rediscover the moral, political and legal attitudes we had in the past. In my opinion, our reputation depends on it.

● (2200)

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to address my colleague. Earlier in the debate, I posted on Facebook that we were having a debate on the situation in the Central African Republic. A Venezuelan national responded. I met her in the past and she told me about the heartbreaking situation in her country.

I would like to talk to my colleague about another issue. Small arms trafficking is very popular in Venezuela, as it is in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As a result, these kinds of situations can happen and deteriorate very quickly and tragically.

Could my colleague comment on the problem of arms trafficking? It is easy to obtain personal arms, which causes a lot of problems around the world.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, let me reiterate that we continue to call on the Conservative government to sign the arms trade treaty. In my view, small arms fuel conflicts like this one. Even the United Nations Security Council has raised this issue. I think that signing this treaty would bode well for Canada.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I must admit that until last Friday, I may have been one of those people who, as my colleague referred to earlier, knew very little about the Central African Republic conflict. I knew something

of it, but not what I should have. I still do not claim to be an expert by any stretch of the imagination.

Last Friday, along with the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, I had the honour of meeting with the ambassador of the Central African Republic, who is stationed in Washington but is duly accredited both to the U.S. and Canada. I observed in this gentleman a very deeply concerned individual. He is concerned for the health and welfare of his country and is honestly seeking assistance in terms of moral support and understanding from the international community. As was alluded to earlier, this is somewhat of a forgotten war.

With that preamble, I would like to comment on some of the issues we are currently aware of as they relate to the Central African Republic.

The situation in the Central African Republic is deeply disturbing. I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the House deliberations today by focusing on the security response.

The Central African Republic has had a particularly troubled history since gaining its independence from France in 1960. Yet, despite poverty, military coups and dictatorships in the Central African Republic, relations have traditionally been peaceful between the country's two largest religious communities, Christians and Muslims.

To be sure, despite the absence of conflict between religious communities, all was not peaceful in the CAR. There were conflicts for access to resources and land between the various communities. These conflicts were based on opportunity, on survival, and on ensuring one's community and one's family would have access to the necessary resources described.

Things changed in March 2013 with the overthrow of Central African Republic President Bozizé, by a loose coalition of mainly Muslim rebel groups known as Séléka. Séléka fighters quickly became infamous for the atrocities and exactions they committed on the people of the CAR, particularly on Christian communities. Seleka's own leader, then President Djotodia, bowed to international pressure and officially disbanded Seleka in September 2013. Despite this, former Seleka fighters continued their abuse of the civilian population of the CAR.

In response, some communities formed self-defence groups called anti-balaka. Some of these groups took the fight directly to Séléka, while others instead chose to retaliate against innocent Muslim civilians. These Muslims retaliated too. As we can see, a vicious spiral was now at work in the CAR. At any moment, someone could be targeted by a sudden outbreak of mob violence, in turn provoking more revenge killings and suffering in the country.

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Now we see a rise in the violence in the CAR, and vigilante violence between neighbours of different faiths have become all too common a sight. Fighting is ongoing in several regions of the country. This is not a conflict over religious beliefs. Rather, it is a cycle of fear and retribution between communities who feel they have nothing left to lose.

Canada has strongly condemned this violence. The Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on December 4, 2013, calling for an immediate end to the violence against civilian populations of all faiths. Last Friday, February 7, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Canada's Ambassador of Religious Freedom issued a joint statement calling for an end to the cycle of violence in the CAR.

This conflict is not a conflict of religious beliefs. There is no right side or wrong side, only an ever-increasing number of victims.

Canada strongly condemns all perpetrators of violence against the civilian population in the CAR. We have not been alone in this. All of our partners have joined in unanimously condemning these massacres and egregious human rights abuses.

As the security situation in the CAR unravelled, an international response was prepared. It became clear that African countries in the region wanted to take the lead in resolving this crisis and in providing for their own security and that of their own continent. In this regard, Canada commends the strong leadership demonstrated by the African Union and its member states, as well as by France in undertaking political and security initiatives to address this crisis.

● (2205)

In December 2013, the United Nations approved the deployment of the African Union international support mission to the CAR, called MISCA, supported by French forces. African troops from nearby countries, such as Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, and more recently Burundi and Rwanda, deployed through the country to restore security and protect CAR citizens. The UN Security Council, deeply concerned by the growing violence against civilians, set up a UN trust fund to allow the international community to finance MISCA.

Canada moved swiftly to support MISCA. On December 15, 2013, the government announced a \$5-million contribution to support MISCA's efforts to restore peace and stability in the CAR through this UN trust fund. Canada's contribution will help to feed, equip and support African Union troops so they can restore security, prevent more violence and protect all communities in the country. The trust fund will also help to pay for outreach activities so that opposing communities can find common ground and a way forward after the conflict is over.

Unfortunately, the conflict in the CAR has worsened in early 2014. MISCA and French forces, just over 6,000 troops in total, are overwhelmed by the scope of the problem. Often they cannot reach hot spots or patrol outside of urban areas. In response, on January 28, the UN Security Council strengthened the role of the UN peacekeeping office in the CAR so it could offer better support to the CAR government. The UN also approved the deployment of a 600-strong European Union mission to assist MISCA in France and extended sanctions against those who engage in or support acts that undermine peace and stability in the CAR.

Canada appreciates the important contribution made by the African countries of MISCA and for the French and EU forces that support them. We sincerely hope these efforts, which our contribution supports, will make a difference on the ground and deliver security back to the people of the CAR.

On January 20, 2014, Catherine Samba-Panza, the mayor of Bangui, was selected as CAR's new transitional president. A few days later she announced the formation of her transitional government. Canada is encouraged by this development as a first step toward restoring constitutional order, fostering the rule of law and establishing a truly democratic process in the CAR. These will be arduous tasks for this new government, and the international community must support it in this goal, as well as in its goal to hold free and democratic elections as soon as conditions allow.

The considerable efforts by the international community to stabilize the country, protect civilians and address the urgent needs of the population deserve recognition. Canada will also do its part for reconciliation between communities in the CAR. I know that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is exploring opportunities for Canada to support projects aimed at facilitating dialogue and reconciliation between communities in the CAR, once the violence subsides enough for this to become possible. This will not be easy for as long as insecurity prevails in the country.

Together with its partners, Canada will continue to assist all the people of the Central African Republic as they strive to overcome this violence in order to rebuild their country, their communities and their livelihoods. We will not abandon them. It is the right thing to do.

● (2210)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his remarks.

As he probably knows, Christian and Muslim communities, the former under the leadership of the Catholic archbishop and the head of Evangelical churches and the latter under the leadership of the chief imam of the Central African Republic, are making major efforts to achieve reconciliation.

Given that peaceful initiatives are needed within and among communities, does my colleague think that this initiative supported by the Government of Canada could go be considered by the Office of Religious Freedom?

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[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Chair, I am really thankful that my colleague raised this point, because that is in fact exactly what the ambassador from the CAR to the U.S. and Canada indicated last week. He was hopeful that he and other leaders in the country could urge the spiritual leaders of the different faith groups within the country to come together and dialogue among themselves as a first step. The bigger step, and the most difficult step, is then to convince their people to lay down their arms and work toward reconciliation.

All of us in this chamber tonight know the value that civil society, faith groups, and volunteer groups in our country contribute to the fabric of our society. Government could never begin to duplicate the work that our civil society and faith groups do within our country. Every one of us sees this when we go back to our ridings on the weekend or during our constituency break weeks. We see the number of volunteer hours and the work that goes into our communities.

We need that same kind of spirit taking hold in the Central African Republic. As I said, the ambassador is encouraging that. I do think that the ambassador of the Office of Religious Freedom here in Canada, Dr. Andrew Bennett, has already made statements to that effect. I think his support and our support will certainly strengthen the hand of those who are trying to work toward reconciliation, and then forgiveness and moving on towards total reconciliation in that country.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to commend the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his remarks this evening, both in chronological sequence and substantively. I want to say I enjoyed his presence on our foreign affairs subcommittee on international human rights, and regret that he has gone on to maybe better things.

I want to put a particular question to him that relates to what we have been discussing this evening but goes somewhat beyond it. The member has made reference to atrocities that have been committed. Earlier in the discussion this evening we talked about how these have risen to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, regrettably tragedies that have repeated themselves here in CAR and have occurred elsewhere.

The UN Security Council, of which the member made mention, in 2005 adopted the responsibility to protect doctrine. That doctrine says simply that whenever there is a situation that has risen to the level of war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and, God forbid, genocide, then there is an obligation on behalf of the international community to protect.

The nature of that protection can take various forms. The member made reference to that. It can be humanitarian assistance. It can be diplomatic engagement. It can be political involvement. It can be military intervention, which requires a UN Security Council mandate in certain circumstances.

The importance of the responsibility to protect doctrine as a foundational normative principle, someone referred to it as one of the most important foundational normative principles since the universal declaration to begin with, cannot be overstated.

On Friday I am going to be participating in a colloquium that is being organized by the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights on the whole question of genocide awareness and prevention, responsibility to protect, or R to P, and the like. I suspect I will be asked what I have been asked elsewhere when we have had these colloquia, does the Government of Canada subscribe to the responsibility to protect doctrine?

I would have assumed that this is a given since it is a United Nations Security Council mandate, and we have in the past affirmed it. However, I have not heard reference, and I am being frank about this, from the Conservative government on this point.

I think it is a crucial point. It is not only a question of whether we are partaking of a foundational international protection doctrine, it is also whether we are sharing with those that the member mentioned, others with whom we work in common cause and who do subscribe to that doctrine, and who do ask me whether we subscribe to it. I like to think that we do.

This is not a Liberal doctrine. This is a United Nations Security Council doctrine. This is an international normative doctrine. This is not a matter of partisan party politics.

I put the question specifically and in good faith. Does the government subscribe to the responsibility to protect doctrine as set forth by the United Nations Security Council in 2005 and which we accepted at the time?

• (2215)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Chair, I want to thank my very learned colleague who has been in this place for many years and has travelled extensively and probably understands these issues far better than most of us.

However, at this point what is important is that the international community comes together and rather than labelling it a genocide or pre-genocide or any of these labels we can put on it, that it continues to work together to encourage the people there on the ground to work together. As they ask for our assistance, we can come alongside them and try to support their efforts; but for us to take unilateral action or action on our own to interject ourselves into their situation at this point is not the way to go.

I do commend our Minister of Foreign Affairs and our ambassador for religious freedom for the work they are doing, and I remain hopeful that we can continue to work in collaboration with our international partners to find a solution to this problem.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, I want to pick up where my hon. friend from Mount Royal left off, and ask my good friend from Kitchener—Conestoga if there has been a change in government policy. Clearly the responsibility to protect doctrine was explicitly used by the current Conservative administration when the initial action in Libya was supported by Canada. Specifically, responsibility to protect was invoked by the Minister of Foreign Affairs right up to the moment when there seemed to be a mission shift to having to get rid of Gadhafi and no longer being motivated primarily by the need to protect civilian life in the region.

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However, I have never heard this particular administration fail to state that responsibility to protect is, as my hon. friend from Mount Royal has said, an important international normative principle to which we all subscribe. Perhaps my hon. friend could just clarify that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Chair, I think we are getting off the central point of the debate tonight. We are here to debate a situation that is occurring in Central African Republic. We have people dying, we have children suffering. Our government has come alongside these groups to try to provide humanitarian assistance. We are going along with UN sanctions as those are put into place, if atrocities are found to have taken place. So it is important that we focus on Central African Republic and the needs of that country right now and what we can do in this particular situation to address those needs.

● (2220)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Chair, we are here tonight to highlight the seriousness of the crisis that is unfolding in the Central African Republic.

I would also like to take this opportunity to draw the government's attention to the issues at play and to what it needs to do to help come up with a solution that is consistent with Canada's humanitarian tradition.

Before getting to the heart of the matter, I would like to echo the statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on February 7 condemning sectarian violence and demanding that security be restored in the Central African Republic.

These are steps that must be taken in order to restore peace and start rebuilding. The fact that Canada is heading in that direction is a good thing.

However, as welcome as those words may be, they are not nearly enough. As we are comfortably debating the crisis in the Central African Republic, over there, blood is being spilled and the body count continues to rise.

That is why the NDP is calling on the government to take responsibility and to take a more decisive role in resolving the conflict. The reality of the situation, its dramatic escalation and the regional impact of the crisis leave us no choice but to intervene.

The result of the wait-and-see approach Canada has taken for more than a year is truly terrifying. After months of violence at the hands of predominantly Muslim Séléka fighters, Christian militias calling themselves anti-balaka went on the offensive in September of last year.

Originally designed as self-defence groups around the time of former president François Bozizé's overthrow, these anti-balaka militias are now taking unspeakable retaliatory action against Muslim minorities in the north.

NGOs have documented truly horrifying accounts of atrocities committed by both sides. Human Rights Watch released a detailed and comprehensive report on the massacres that have been carried out; I would like to draw your attention to these massacres.

Women and children in particular are systematically targeted, as we saw during the civil war that ravaged the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and as is commonplace in these kinds of conflicts.

The rape and mutilation of women and children are now being used as weapons of war. Belligerents deliberately target these innocent victims in the most despicable ways, leaving terror and destruction in their wake.

The situation continues to worsen in the Central African Republic, even though a transitional government has taken over, led by President Catherine Samba-Panza.

In the past few days, a hundred more people have been killed. A parliamentarian was even the victim of a cowardly assassination a few hours after he denounced all instances of interfaith violence. However, the massacres represent only a small part of what is going on in the Central African Republic.

There are now 825,000 refugees and displaced persons in this country of 5 million, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It has also indicated that 60% of them are children. More than half of these refugees are in the vicinity of Bangui. They are in need of everything: water, shelter, food, primary care. Two hundred and fifty-six thousand refugees have already fled to neighbouring countries that are very unstable themselves.

Without a real assessment of the security situation, it will be hard to find a solution to the devastating catastrophe in the Central African Republic.

We need to take action to secure the situation. African peacekeeping forces need help protecting civilians. The need for help is even more evident if we recall the Kosovo crisis, when 7,000 men were deployed to Mitrovica, a city of 100,000 people.

This crisis is exacerbating the situation in an already unstable region. Countries surrounding the CAR, in particular the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, are struggling with political crises and civil wars that are seriously compromising the stability of the region.

The fear is that this new surge of violence could trigger a regional conflict that could have disastrous consequences. That is why we must act now to stabilize this country.

● (2225)

To date, Canada has provided \$6.9 million in humanitarian aid for the people of the Central African Republic. Yesterday, the government announced an additional \$5 million in financial aid. Although necessary, these measures will not be enough to significantly change the situation.

In November 2013, the NDP asked the government to provide diplomatic and logistical support for the peacekeeping force so that it could end the conflict and human rights violations. Only a political solution can resolve the crisis by bringing together all those involved in the conflict and settling their differences. A political solution is the only way to achieve real and lasting peace.

Government Orders

That is why Canada must support the democratic transitional government led by Catherine Samba-Panza. We must also help implement the UN Security Council resolutions that call for democratic elections to be held in February 2015.

To that end, we are asking that short- and long-term observers be deployed through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development's CANADEM program. These elections cannot be held in proper conditions until order is restored and the militias have laid down their weapons. There are simple ways to encourage them to do so.

For instance, Séléka soldiers should be integrated into the regular army. The army should also be paid. That would make it possible to stabilize the situation and to inject money into the local economy, which sorely needs it. A few million dollars might be enough to start restoring order.

Furthermore, this outbreak of violence is the result of a political crisis rooted in this country's extreme poverty and underdevelopment. It is imperative to tackle the root causes of the destabilization. Otherwise, any assistance we may send will be in vain in the long term.

Canada must get involved in the economic development of African countries. To that end, it must ensure that its partnerships with Canadian industries that extract raw materials allow for a fair distribution of profits to the local people, not just to the elite in those countries and to company shareholders.

Finally, we in the NDP call on Canada to sign the Arms Trade Treaty in order to prevent conventional weapons from fuelling conflicts.

Let me remind hon. members that, in a similar conflict that affected a neighbouring country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the combatants did not use any heavy weapons or weapons of mass destruction. However, the civil war that ravaged that country between 1998 and 2002 killed over 3 million people. It is the deadliest conflict since World War II.

It is therefore imperative to take every possible measure to put an end to small arms trade and trafficking. If we do not make an effort to do so, conditions will continue to exist so that political crises in African countries turn into civil wars time after time.

Those are the main actions that Canada should take to alleviate the humanitarian crisis right away and to strengthen the peace process in the longer term.

I urge the government to take these simple measures. They will send a strong message of support to the people of the Central African Republic and will mitigate the overall factors that lead to crises in Africa in the long term.

The gravity of the situation, our country's history and our humanist values require us to act. Let us not stand by and watch.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canada can play an important role in the EU deployment to the Central African Republic, which has been officially agreed to. We have a framework agreement with the EU to participate in European crisis

management operations and should engage with our partners through this to help our European friends and allies protect civilians in the Central African Republic and restore security.

Does the member think that Canada can have a significant impact in bolstering the EU force, for example, through providing equipment and logistical or financial support?

• (2230)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

Canada has a huge role to play, obviously. As a strong country, a strong advocate for peace that has taken an active role in previous conflicts, Canada must fully take its place when conflicts emerge.

In this case, the government is called on to stand by the African Union forces and to take action, as other countries, including France, have already done. I believe Canada needs to play an active role.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am pondering some rather deep questions. One has to wonder whether all those rich countries that have exploited Africa for hundreds of years are now in a state of moral collapse.

African products are worth hundreds of billions of dollars a year. Everyone has coltan that was extracted by children in African mines. All of this wealth is controlled by criminals who order massacres all over the place. Now that something needs to be done to help people out, the rich industrialized countries that benefit from Africa's bounty should all step in and put an end to the slaughter.

In Rwanda, 700 or 800 well-armed men might have been able to stop the massacre in a few hours, as General Dallaire used to say. We see how things are shaping up; there is no end in sight. Many people seem to think, like Joseph Stalin, that "when one person dies, it is a tragedy; when millions die, it is a statistic". I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for the question.

As I said in my speech, I wholeheartedly think that Africa is not doomed, in that certain things can truly be prevented. We are well aware that in African countries, a combination of a number of factors can ignite things quickly and significantly.

I am thinking of extreme poverty, overpopulation, lack of education, and so forth. My colleague also raised the issue of morality. Indeed, we know that Canada is one of those countries whose economy benefits from this resource extraction.

However, when will we stop and think that this mineral extraction sector of the economy must stop being used to ignite and fuel conflicts?

Government Orders

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, I remember when I used to be responsible for human security at the Department of Foreign Affairs, and I remember all the work we used to do with women on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, reconciliation and dialogue.

Earlier, someone pointed out and it should be noted that the Central African Republic has a female president. Nonetheless, besides the female president, I wondered if my colleague saw an opportunity or a particular role for Central African women in the effort that should be made to resolve this conflict and restore peace.

• (2235)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for the question, one that speaks to me in so many ways.

I fundamentally believe that African countries and developing countries have a growing need for female governance. We need to call attention to the place of women in Africa and find a way to raise their profile. There are women business owners, female workers, women who are sometimes the sole providers for their families. We have a duty to support these women's networks, to support these women who land in positions such as the current interim president. We need to really support her and stand behind her.

We also need to send a strong message. Canada can send these strong messages and tell the interim president that she has our support and we will be there for her so that her country can get back on its feet and get out of this situation.

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to hear some of the discussion that has gone on here tonight about the strength of women in the African continent. I have visited 18 African countries, and in every African country I have met African women of great strength who are doing amazing things in their political sphere.

Would my colleague not agree that the Government of Canada is putting forward money to help with these initiatives? Does she not think we should continue doing that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. The importance of helping women, as I just mentioned, the need to support them and really give them the tools they need to be able to access governance roles and leadership roles is clear. There is no doubt in my mind about that. I believe that positive, peaceful revolutions in Africa will be led by women. We need to be aware of that and continue to support all African women in that regard.

In closing, I wish to come back to something my colleague said about the responsibility to protect doctrine. There are sensible tools in place, tools that are accepted internationally. Why not really use those tools to make a difference in the lives of people who are suffering and who are subjected to these massacres?

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Chair, I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion

on the situation in the Central African Republic by focusing on the response of the international community to this crisis.

[*Translation*]

In November 2013, the UN stated that the country was on the verge of descending into total chaos, with violence sparking retaliatory action against civilians. Through its political mission, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic, or BINUCA, the UN struggled to keep the situation under control.

• (2240)

[*English*]

The deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation, along with an increase in violence between groups who are Christian and Muslim, led to the UN Security Council adopting resolution 2127 on December 5, 2013. The resolution authorizes the African Union-led international support mission in the CAR, la Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine, known as MISCA, to protect civilians, stabilize the country, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The resolution also authorizes France to support MISCA, paving the way for France to deploy *l'opération Sangaris*, involving 1,600 French troops. The UN Security Council has asked for options to transform MISCA into a UN peacekeeping force by March 2014.

MISCA brings together over 5,000 soldiers from Burundi, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and Chad. The Democratic Republic of Congo has also promised troops.

Since its deployment in December 2013, MISCA has already lost 12 soldiers as of February 7. At France's request, the countries of the European Union committed to sending 600 troops to the CAR to support MISCA and the French forces present there.

On January 28, the UN Security Council unanimously approved resolution 2134, which among other decisions, expands the sanctions regime for the CAR. This sanctions regime targets the ring leaders of groups blamed for massacres and human rights abuses. It obliges all UN members to freeze funds, financial assets, and economic resources that are owned or controlled by individuals who violate the arms embargo, commit abuses from rape to recruitment of children in armed conflicts, and undermine peace and stability. Canada will fully implement these UN sanctions.

Also, the CAR has many other partners and supporters who care about its fate. Due to its colonial past and its resulting relationship with the CAR, France has been active in the efforts to bring an end to the conflict and is leading international efforts to increase UN action in the CAR.

In addition to deploying 1,600 troops through *l'opération Sangaris*, France provided \$3.4 million in food and humanitarian assistance in 2013. Two French soldiers were killed in the CAR in December of 2013.

Government Orders

It became clear that African countries in the region wanted to take the lead in resolving this crisis and in providing for their own security and that of their own continent. In this regard, Canada commends the strong leadership demonstrated by the African Union and its member states, as well as by France, in undertaking political and security initiatives to address this crisis.

Like Canada, the United States has advocated for attention to be placed on building a fair and peaceful election process in order to establish a legitimate and elected government in the CAR.

[*Translation*]

When the government was overthrown in March 2013, the Francophonie, including Canada, passed a resolution suspending the Central African Republic's membership. Members of the Francophonie continue to monitor the situation closely, with an eye to potentially supporting the rebuilding process in collaboration with the international community.

[*English*]

The worsening of the conflict in the CAR has further increased tensions among some countries in the central African region. Resentment against Chadian soldiers and civilians has grown, particularly among Christian communities in the CAR.

Some Chadian peacekeepers in an earlier mission for the consolidation of peace in the Central African Republic, named MICOPAX, were accused of freely allowing Séléka rebels into Bangui in March 2013. Some Chadian soldiers were also involved in violent episodes with soldiers from other MISCA contingents. Demonstrations were held in Bangui to denounce their lack of neutrality. The MISCA high command decided to transfer the Chadian soldiers to the northern part of the country.

At the end of December, fearing for the safety of its nationals, the Chadian government evacuated 10,000 people from the CAR. Meanwhile, Chad played a positive role in pressuring Séléka leader and former interim president Djotodia to step down.

International engagement in the CAR has significantly increased through the enhanced humanitarian response in the country. Prior to the crisis escalating in 2013, international agencies were active in the CAR but primarily through international development programming.

Responding to the dramatically increased needs in the international humanitarian system, ranking the CAR among its highest priority responses, United Nations agencies and international NGOs have ramped up their presence and widened their operations considerably throughout the country. International humanitarian agencies not previously present in the country, including Save the Children and the International Organization for Migration have begun operations in the CAR over the last few months.

Overall, despite being hindered in their efforts to assist people by the continuing insecurity and looting, humanitarian agencies are increasing their capacities in response to the crisis with a particular focus on strengthening responses outside of the capital of Bangui where there have been considerable unmet needs.

During this crisis, Canada once again stepped up its humanitarian efforts as part of the international community. In 2013, as my colleague mentioned earlier, Canada provided \$6.95 million in

humanitarian assistance to those affected by the violence in the CAR, making Canada the sixth largest bilateral humanitarian donor that year.

Another Canadian humanitarian allocation of \$5 million to the CAR was announced yesterday by the Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie. We hope that our efforts, in co-operation with our friends and partners, will contribute to putting an end to the spiralling violence and ensure a calm and peaceful transition process in the Central African Republic.

• (2245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is clear from listening to the government members that they have done their homework because they are telling us all about the horrible situation in the CAR. Everyone knows that it is an appalling situation, and that it may even be a case of ethnic cleansing.

The real aim of this take note debate is to talk about what Canada can do to help these people. Take note debates are rare. When they do happen, it is not so we can get an overview of the situation. It is to determine what we can do. Clearly, the government believes that the \$5-million contribution it announced yesterday is more than enough.

I would like to ask my colleague if he really thinks that the \$17 million that Canada has provided over the course of this horrible conflict is enough.

Mr. Bernard Trotter: Mr. Chair, I appreciate my colleague's question, but I have to correct a figure that he mentioned. Since 2007, Canada has invested \$25 million in the Central African Republic.

In my opinion, if we want to get results when dealing with a very violent situation, we must work with multilateral organizations such as the African Union and with the people on the ground. We have to support them. France has had a presence in this country for a long time and has the military capability to help people right now in terms of security. Unilateral action by Canada will not resolve the situation in the CAR.

We have been helping Central Africa and West Africa with long-term projects run by multilateral organizations such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

With respect to the Central African Republic, for the time being Canada must work with its partners on the ground.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, I will follow up on the question by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie and my friend the parliamentary secretary. Regardless of what side we sit on—and of course this being a take note debate we could have sat wherever we wanted, and perhaps we should have, to break down the notion of partisanship—we all recognize that this is a complicated situation, a gathering storm that points toward a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Government Orders

We read the commentary from Médecins Sans Frontières, from Amnesty International, from Human Rights Watch, lamenting how slow has been the international response, how little the conflict has been noticed. It may not be months that we have to respond adequately. It may be weeks. It may be days.

In that context, would the parliamentary secretary not agree that Canada should be prepared to step up, not just with money, but with whatever is asked of us by the international community, the United Nations, the European Union, France, those countries that are already marshalling to put people on the ground, keep the peace, and protect the lives of innocents?

• (2250)

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, Canada has stepped up. We talked about the dollars, and obviously the dollars are not enough. There are all kinds of diplomacy and effort we have to apply, through all our channels, in order to bring about change.

If we look at just the dollars, Canada is the sixth largest donor of humanitarian assistance in the Central African Republic. It is not a situation we created. It is halfway around the world, and we really are stepping up and doing what we can.

The assistance we are providing to France, the European Union, and the African Union is not negligible. I think there is more we can do, similar to our intervention in Mali, where we provided the French military with logistical support. These are things we need to explore. How we can provide that kind of assistance.

It is always a complicated situation. Those who have served in multilateral peacekeeping efforts know how complicated the chain of command can be, so we have to go in there with our eyes wide open. We need to look at how we can help and provide assistance to those actually doing the effort on the ground.

The NGOs on the ground are also in great danger, so we need to make sure their security is first and foremost. Otherwise, any kind of food and medical aid is just lost through looting.

Those are the kinds of things we need to do, and we will continue to look at them in the coming weeks.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Canada's influence and credibility on the world stage have been diminishing for some time now. Does my colleague not think it would be necessary, as part of an international obligation of co-operation, to ensure that Canada takes a more active role in this situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, there are many countries in the world where we can intervene, and I think we have to look at each case on its own merits. In some cases, Canada does take the lead role.

In the case of the Central African Republic, for the most part we are looking to the African Union. It is the leader right now when it comes to deploying security efforts on the ground, and we are going to play a support role.

To the question from the hon. member on whether Canada should bypass the African Union or even bypass France, which actually has some troops deployed there, I think the answer is clearly no. However, we will do everything we can to support those lead countries in their efforts on the ground right now.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I know that when a take note debate takes place, it appears that it is only at this point in time that Canada is actually involved. I look back at a year ago when we were having emergency debates on Mali. Canada stepped up and helped out with humanitarian initiatives there. Mali is a country with a long engagement with Canada. Canada has been present there for over 20 years.

Could my colleague talk about the importance of being present? Canada has contributed \$25 million over the last number of years to the Central African Republic. We continue to give through our maternal and newborn child health initiatives. We just did a replenishment of \$650 million for the Global Fund. Part of that money will be going into the Central African Republic. These are the kinds of initiatives that are ongoing.

I wonder if my colleague could speak about ongoing engagement and how important it is to see long-term progress on the economy and on health initiatives.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Mr. Chair, there are actually two parts to the answer to that question. One part is the long-term assistance we have been providing to not just the CAR but to countries throughout Africa and the developing world. Canada is a major developer through initiatives like the Global Fund to combat AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. So far we have contributed \$2.1 billion since it was founded in 2002. We have continuing projects when it comes to development.

The other important plank, the second part of that question, is economic development. This is where Canadian companies are tremendous creators of wealth and prosperity through direct foreign investment in Africa. In so many African countries, Canadian companies are the major sources of direct foreign investment.

In my interactions in Africa in the last two and a half years, I have had the opportunity to interact with many African parliamentarians, and they talk about how much they welcome Canadian investment in their countries. One of the main reasons is that Canadians are generally very good corporate citizens and also have a fundamentally different approach when it comes to developing human resources compared to, say, investments from China. For one thing it is too expensive for Canadians to bring plane loads of their own employees in all cases. At the worker level, at the supervisory level, and even at the middle management level, Canadian companies want to develop African skills and capabilities, especially in the minerals, oil and gas, and energy sectors. That is a way we can positively contribute to long-term development in Africa.

Government Orders

• (2255)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chair, first, I would like to thank all my colleagues who took part in this debate this evening and those who will take part after my presentation. We may not always agree on how to intervene and address a problem, but it is fair to say that everyone who has taken part in the debate has a great affinity for the African continent. I also want to thank the government for agreeing to have this take note debate. I want to thank the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre for her role in ensuring that we could have this debate. Her efforts may even have encouraged the government to provide an additional \$5 million in humanitarian aid yesterday. I want to thank the government for that as well.

I now want to get into the heart of the debate. We did not manage to prevent the current conflict in the Central African Republic. We did not listen or learn any of the lessons we claimed we learned from the situation in Rwanda in 1994. The international family must now prevent that same type of situation from happening in the Central African Republic.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs was absolutely right when he said that for the situation to improve at all, it needs to be stabilized first. The member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière asked the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie whether people working for our NGOs were safe. He suggested that they were not and that we should therefore not send them.

In terms of a secure corridor and NGO workers, the situation is not at all safe, and it is completely unsafe for the local people, who have been displaced internally and are now refugees in the six countries bordering the Central African Republic. The international community really needs to make sure that this does not turn into a massacre because it sure looks like that is where things are headed. We are not the ones talking about ethnic cleansing. The BBC, *Le Monde* and others in the media—they are talking about it. The international community needs to deal with this situation, and we are part of that.

The African Union and the European Union are involved now. France did well to take the initiative, just like it did last year in Mali. We are members of the United Nations, and if it wants to be involved in peacekeeping, it will probably ask us to participate. I hope that we will agree to participate to prevent a massacre. That is the first thing I wanted to say.

Second, I really like Africa. What we are doing tonight is helping a country, of course, but let us not forget that there are 54 countries in Africa. In my presentations, I often point out that society needs both optimists and pessimists. One invents the airplane and the other, the parachute.

This evening, there is a good deal of pessimism about the situation in the Central African Republic, and rightly so. For the continent, however, there are reasons for optimism. A number of countries are doing very well in terms of economic development, peace, and democracy taking root. There are fewer and fewer conflicts in Africa. So when they happen, they are more visible, which reinforces

the unfortunate impression that the world has about the African continent.

In that context, I would not want people listening to us to say that everything in Africa is going badly. There are some situations, such as those in the Central African Republic, in South Sudan and, of course, in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where, as the hon. member for Ottawa Centre has said, more than 5 million people have been killed since the 1990s. Unfortunately, it goes on almost unnoticed under the international radar.

• (2300)

That said, this situation is unacceptable and the international family has to take steps to prevent it.

Since this is a take note debate, I am going to invite the government to consider an idea. We in Canada cannot provide first-line aid for all the countries of Africa. We have created relationships with certain countries, including the neighbouring South Sudan, and Mali, on which the two parliamentary secretaries spoke earlier. I think we have to strengthen those relations.

Since Mali has been mentioned, let me follow up on that idea. Two years ago, the bilateral aid program for Mali was suspended. Today, I think every country has reinstated it, except Canada. Why? I have asked the question before and have not received an answer. It is incredible. We are not talking about \$5 million, but about an amount of nearly \$100 million that has not been reinstated.

It is part of our responsibility to help countries with which we have close ties, so that situations do not degenerate, as could easily happen. Mali has been in this situation and we suspended our bilateral aid program. The situation has stabilized: the presidential election went well and things are moving along nicely. Every other country has reinstated its program. Canada has not.

Incidentally, we should perhaps explore this issue and resolve it. Perhaps a lack of money is standing in the way of restoring this program. Not restoring it means we have more than enough money to help the Republic of Central Africa. We could do much more than what we are currently doing. It had to be said.

This is also about the responsibility to protect, the doctrine adopted by the United Nations that seems to be supported by all UN members. In reference to this doctrine, we should be sending very clear signals, because Canada believes in that policy of responsibility to protect the population, for example when a government cannot do so or, even worse, when a government attacks its own people. We do not necessarily have to send 5,000 soldiers. I said 5,000 because that is the number needed in the CAR.

People seem to agree that in order to restore peace and stabilize the CAR, the number of soldiers would have to increase from the current 7,000 to 12,000. I am not saying that Canada should send these soldiers. However, if the United Nations were to decide that this approximate number of soldiers was needed to impose stability and peace and it requested our help, I hope that we would respond favourably. Otherwise, we would be failing in our responsibility as a member of the United Nations family.

Government Orders

That said, I do not think we should forget about humanitarian assistance. The announcements made yesterday and in December, as well as the \$5 million for the current mission in the CAR, are good initiatives on the part of the government, and I commend the government for that. However, I think we need to go beyond that tonight.

A number of members have explained how things got to this point. No one is questioning that. However, the point of tonight's debate is to figure out where we go from here and what Canada will do to prevent a massacre. We will then have to look at establishing the institutions a country needs in the long term, to produce its own food, provide security for all citizens and address other fundamental issues, such as health and education.

I hope that the government will prove willing to take action in the coming days, as most Canadians are expecting.

I am not saying that we need to do everything and help in every situation. Absolutely not. However, we have to at least do our share.

I urge the government to take note of this evening's speeches and to take action.

• (2305)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, I note that the member across the way is one of the co-chairs of the Canada–Africa Parliamentary Association.

My question for him is this. How has his participation in this organization and the on-the-ground knowledge he has gained on that continent contributed to his ability to participate in this debate tonight?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, I have had the great privilege of being co-chair for a few years now. I was involved at the founding of the Canada–Africa Parliamentary Association and next month we are going to celebrate its 10th anniversary. This association is involved at the level of parliaments in Africa, whose importance we are trying to strengthen in their democratic systems.

It has allowed me to learn a great deal about Africa and its diversity. The fact of its diversity is very important to my colleague from Newmarket—Aurora, who knows Ghana extremely well. Ghana is a country that is doing relatively well. We have been to many countries that are doing relatively well and to many that are not doing very well. Not long ago we came away from South Sudan, understanding that country would be in a dire situation, and indeed that is what has happened.

I am not alone in learning about Africa. All of our colleagues who also come around and visit in bilateral missions do so, and we should continue to do that because it improves our understanding of the continent and helps us convince our government, whomever that may be, of the importance of enhancing our relationships with the continent and its 54 countries.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my friend and colleague for the tremendous work he does for and with Africa, and for his speech tonight. I would like to raise an issue that has not been talked about much tonight, and that is food.

Before the conflict, 30% of households, some 1.3 million people, lacked consistent access to adequate food. Now a recent assessment shows that many families are now eating one meal a day instead of two or three; 60% of households have no food stocks available; and across the country food prices have increased substantially because fighting has disrupted transport, markets, and traders. At the moment, insecurity is the greatest obstacle to delivering aid. Humanitarian agencies need to plan assistance by the hour to exploit windows of opportunity. Almost all communities, some 94%, have reported not having enough seed for the next planting season, which raises the risk of a poor harvest in 2014.

The reality is the United Nations needs \$551 million. It only has 11% of the funds. I am wondering what my colleague thinks Canada should do to close this gap in co-operation with our friends and allies.

• (2310)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, in a situation such as the one prevailing in the Central African Republic, the first thing that has to be established is stability so that food and water can be delivered. Security has to be the first thing that is dealt with, very rapidly, and then water because a person cannot survive more than two or three days without water, and then food, and preferably food and water at the same. However, for that they need the ability to distribute.

There is enough will and capacity in the world to help the Central African Republic in its situation, and also to help it grow the food it will need down the road. Again, maybe I am focused a little too much, but I believe that the ability to help these people have water and food might not be met unless there is stability and an ability to deliver that food in the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Chair, my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier raised a very interesting point. Indeed, to intervene in a situation like this one, there are certain steps that cannot be skipped. For instance, stopping the massacre is absolutely crucial, but it will not be stopped with slogans like “Responsible Resource Extraction” and “Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity”. It will take people on the ground.

Last summer, I met a Canadian soldier who had served in East Timor. He was wounded, which compromised his well-being for the rest of his life. He told me that he had never been so proud of his profession and had never felt more useful in the world than on that mission. I think East Timor was a success story for Canada. I wonder if my colleague could elaborate on that.

Government Orders

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, when you live in a country—in the capital or elsewhere—and at any time of the day or night, there could be an invasion, women and girls could be raped, children could be kidnapped or killed, and everything could be destroyed, the main thing that people want is to be able to say, “I will not be killed today”, “I will not be raped today”, “I will not be abducted to become a child soldier”. That is all you want when you are living in that kind of situation.

As my colleague said earlier, this horrible situation must be brought to an end. People are not safe. Once that is done, the rest will follow. The international community cannot act as though it does not understand what is happening in the CAR. We need to act; otherwise, people will say that we have not learned from other massacres even though we always say that we have. Let us prove it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier for his speech.

I would like to ask him if agrees that it is urgent that Canada resume its place as a leader among nations. In recent years, perhaps the last six or seven, we have lost that role; we have lost respect. It is true that the government, the Prime Minister's administration, has provided funds, but we have not discussed this issue with the urgency that this crisis requires. Would the hon. member agree with that?

• (2315)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, I do not disagree, because there is an element of urgency and, in my opinion, a moral obligation to act. I want to qualify that by saying that nobody can expect a single country, such as Canada, to solve every problem.

We have to be part of collective solutions, and collective responsibility usually arises from multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union. We need to participate in and support such efforts without necessarily taking on all of the responsibility. I do not think that would be fair to our taxpayers and our constituents. Still, we have to do our part because that is what all Canadians expect us to do.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, I rise today during this important take note debate about the desperate situation in the Central African Republic to discuss the impact of the conflict upon the most vulnerable in society: the innocent civilians; the women and children in particular.

The impact of armed conflict on families in society is terrible enough when waged between soldiers, even when they adhere to the Geneva Convention to respect the non-combatant status of innocent civilians and civilian institutions, such as homes, schools, hospitals, and places of worship.

Sadly, we have been reminded too often over the past several decades of the additional horrors that ethnic and sectarian conflicts impose upon the most vulnerable in society.

Worse yet, is the inexplicably heinous practice of deliberately targeting civilian women and children as a tactic of war itself. There is, too often, no accountability for those who commit these crimes

and the commanders who direct them or those who wilfully turn a blind eye.

The devastating effects upon women and children is complicated and compounded because of the physiological, psychological, and social damage to women, children, and their families. They do not end when the conflict stops, and it is not easily repaired in the immediate aftermath. The damage often lasts for the victim's entire lifetime.

In Syria, there is already talk of a “lost generation” of children impacted by that war.

The reports coming out of the Central African Republic are deeply disturbing. Senior UN officials, humanitarian groups, and human rights monitors are telling us that the atrocities are being committed against civilians by all parties to the conflict.

Women and girls are being raped as a weapon of war and are suffering all forms of sexual violence. Children are being recruited, and their innocence exploited to commit atrocities against their neighbours. UNICEF estimates that up to 6,000 children are now associated with the fighting forces. Forced marriages, often involving children, are being contracted by some of the parties to the conflict.

The situation in the Central African Republic is very grim for women and children. Yet the fact that we are receiving these reports and discussing the immediate and long-term impact on women and children is an indication that the global norms on the protection of civilians have changed for the better. We are not turning a blind eye to this appalling situation.

The change in global norms has not come easily, and Canada has been at the vanguard. Canada plays a leading role in international efforts to protect civilians, especially women and children. Just last year, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs and like-minded colleagues, launched declarations at both the G8 and the UN on preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict. Already, some 137 countries have joined in the commitment to end these crimes.

Canada is leading in the efforts to end the practice of child, early, and forced marriage wherever it occurs around the world. Early marriage, as young as nine years old, robs young girls of their childhood, their education, and the opportunity to lead productive lives. It threatens their health and their future.

Canada is taking action on the ground wherever these issues occur. In 2012, our Prime Minister announced a Canadian contribution of \$18.5 million over five years to prevent and respond to sexual violence in the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Canada supports the training of international experts in the investigation and the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence, who can be deployed rapidly to countries of concern, and it is now addressing these issues in the Central African Republic.

Government Orders

● (2320)

Canada is supporting the deployment of African Union troops, who have a mandate to protect civilians and try to bring the conflict to an end. Canada is generously contributing to the provision of humanitarian assistance to the severely affected civilian population in the Central African Republic and to refugees in neighbouring countries.

Canada's contributions to humanitarian assistance in the Central African Republic and the region have supported responses to address grave human rights abuses, such as sexual violence and the recruitment of children. For example, last year Canada's support to UNICEF in the Central African Republic led to 1,431 survivors of gender-based violence receiving support and 182 children being released from armed groups. Canada contributed to UNICEF's treatment of 13,225 malnourished children in the Central African Republic last year.

This past December, Canada's ambassador to the UN hosted a high-level event for international agencies that have experience and capacities in the Central African Republic to bring attention to the plight of civilians and plan appropriate responses. On January 20, Canada delivered a strong statement at the special session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, with a focus on the dire situation for women and children in the Central African Republic.

Ending violence against women by supporting women and girls in the realization of their full human rights is one of Canada's policy objectives for advancing the equality of women and men. A key element in ending the violence, supporting a rapid recovery, and rebuilding communities is ensuring that women can meaningfully participate in the political, economic, and social lives of their communities and countries. Exclusion of women and girls is a barrier to lasting peace, prosperity, and development.

Another key is to ensure that the post-conflict processes and transitional justice do not grant amnesty for serious crimes against women and children. Canada has experience in responding to violence against women and children in other conflict situations, such as the DRC, Colombia, Darfur, Afghanistan, and South Sudan. The Canadian government has the capacity and the intention to assist the efforts in the Central African Republic to support the human rights of women and children. Canada condemns attacks on civilians, including women and children, and calls on all parties to cease fighting and respect the lives and dignity of civilians. Canada will continue to assist civilians who are affected by the violence, especially the women and children.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, particularly for raising the issues of women and children.

As my hon. colleague and friend from Ottawa—Vanier said, the priority is security. Does my colleague think that Canada should increase funding to the UN trust fund to support the African Union MISCA force? Should Canada consider sending technical advisers to assist the force in establishing proper command and control functions, as well as consider providing logistical support, as many of our partners have done and as we have done in the past?

● (2325)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, we are deeply concerned by the rapid deterioration of the security and the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic and its impact on innocent lives.

In 2013, Canada provided \$6.95 million to support humanitarian organizations to meet the urgent needs of those affected by the violence in the Central African Republic, including \$750,000 to address the needs of Central African Republic refugees. Very recently, our government announced \$5 million in new humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs of those affected by this crisis, including \$2 million for food assistance in the operation.

We will continue to closely monitor the evolving humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic and will remain prepared to respond according to the level of need.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Chair, there were times when I found it a little difficult to listen to such debate.

While our colleague talked to us about dollar amounts and Canada's great humanitarian success in the CAR, people took refuge at the airport. They huddled up against the fences and were attacked with machetes by killers. They would like to leave, but the airport has not been secured.

Have we not reached the point where we should send military assistance or logistical support to secure the airport and help these people leave and save their lives?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, the humanitarian agencies in the Central African Republic are facing significant challenges in their efforts to reach those in need and those in urgent need of assistance. Even before the crisis, the Central African Republic was a challenging place to operate in, with poor roads and minimal infrastructure in rural areas. Over the course of the last year, many operating bases of humanitarian organizations were looted, were destroyed, making it very challenging to find appropriate buildings and warehouses from which to deliver the assistance to remote areas.

Furthermore, the violence and insecurity in many parts of the country have forced aid organizations to restrict their movement in certain areas or to relocate staff to safer zones. Nonetheless, we are encouraged by the significant efforts being made to expand the humanitarian presence and response in the Central African Republic. In this context, Canadian assistance has supported the provision of food assistance, increasing access to health services, as well as water and sanitation facilities, enhancing the livelihood opportunities, and providing protection services for the most vulnerable.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, poverty, underdevelopment and inequality are fuelling tensions and violence in the Central African Republic. They are really part of the underlying problem whose effects we are now seeing.

Government Orders

We see this especially in regions where local populations do not benefit from resource extraction.

I would like to ask my colleague how her government will ensure that local populations, and not just the elite and shareholders, will truly benefit from resource development, because that does not happen automatically.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, Canada shares the serious concern expressed by the United Nations Security Council in its resolution 2134 with regard to the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Central African Republic and by the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. We are particularly alarmed by the increasing cycle of violence and retaliation in the Central African Republic and the risk of further deterioration of the situation. There are credible reports of a total breakdown in law and order and widespread human rights abuses.

The prosecutor of the ICC has opened a preliminary examination into the current situation in the Central African Republic in order to determine if a formal investigation into these allegations of killings, rape, destruction of property, pillaging, torture, forced displacement, and recruitment of children in hostilities is required.

• (2330)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, one of the recurring themes throughout the debate tonight is how we can be proactive and help to prevent these kinds of situations from happening in future. Our government has invested in new mechanisms for agriculture that would help these populations develop their own agriculture and food for the future.

I wonder if my colleague has any comment on how economic development can help prevent these kinds of situations from happening in the future.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, in order to have economic development, there has to be security, strong and stable government institutions, as well as a justice system. When those systems are in place, economic development through agriculture and other sectors is more possible.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, as this take note debate has made clear, all parties in this place are concerned about the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic. We bring different degrees of policy solutions to the table. None of us has all of the answers. This is a complex, difficult and dangerous situation, particularly for the most vulnerable, particularly for children, on both sides of the conflict.

The sectarian violence is displacing tens of thousands, if not millions of people. In fact, the number right now is one million people have been displaced by the sectarian violence in the Central African Republic. There is no side to take here, except for the side of peace. There is no side to take here, except for the side of non-violence.

Given how complex the Central African Republic situation is, and the fact that it appears to be worsening by the day, and while we thank the administration for putting money toward the crisis, would my hon. friend agree that we may be called upon to do more? Would

she agree that there is a collective will in this place, reflected through the take note debate, on all sides of the House, that if asked, we would do more? We would examine the need to do more and to do it urgently.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, it has been demonstrated that we are closely watching the situation. Last year we gave substantial funds toward security and food for the displaced people, as well as for the people inside the country. We just did so again recently. Certainly we have a record of giving more.

As this debate draws to an end, I would like to thank everyone who sat here and listened all night for the attention they are paying to this very grave situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to start off by thanking all my colleagues who have participated in this committee of the whole this evening and who have taken this debate to a level worthy of praise. It was really important to take stock of the situation in the Central African Republic, considering the rapid deterioration of the current situation, which is extremely tragic.

Like I said earlier, as the member for Beauport—Limoilou, I am privileged to be in contact with nationals of the Central African Republic in the Central African community of the greater Quebec City area.

Over the past two years that I have been in contact with them on a regular basis, I have been amazed and astounded to see the strong sense of belonging, of course, and the networking throughout the various events they have organized.

Take the holiday season for example. They organized a very vibrant and joyful Christmas celebration, and their compatriots from across Quebec, and even other parts of Canada, came to Quebec City to celebrate Christmas and to be together and socialize. We might even say to find solace in each other, but that is not really the term. They were really there to support each other, given how concerned and worried they are about their loved ones in their home country.

My colleagues from all parties have mentioned in their speeches that the situation in the Central African Republic is not without precedent, far from it. It is actually a situation that has shown for decades that the constitutional state, or—to actually focus on a specific state organization—that the organized state has never been a reality, especially outside the capital of Bangui.

The Central African Republic has gone through the torment of dictatorships and then the vacuums that followed them. It is experiencing great difficulty in mastering democracy, organizing itself and providing its citizens with safe surroundings.

Government Orders

We could cite other unfortunate examples of countries next to or farther away from the Central African Republic, such as Sudan and South Sudan, which were once a single state and were torn apart by domestic conflicts. The Democratic Republic of Congo is another example of a never-ending and forgotten conflict despite the millions upon millions of deaths. In fact, it is practically impossible to tally the deaths. What comes to mind even more quickly for me, and an example that should compel us to be very worried for the future of the CAR, is another conflict that unfortunately has been completely forgotten, or another completely disorganized country that is a state in name only, and that is Somalia.

The Federal Republic of Somalia fell prey to factions that fought to gain control of the country, often for very special interests, I would even say base sectarian interests. Unfortunately these groups managed to arm themselves with incredible ease, to our great shame, far from the watchful eye of the West, against our desire and ability to take action and to influence the destiny of these abandoned peoples.

• (2335)

When my constituents originally from the Central African Republic came to see me—I mentioned this earlier—I was very surprised to see that, beyond their concerns, they were actually very confident and hopeful about Canada's ability, through its presence and by speaking and expressing itself on the ground, to have an influence beyond what I could have imagined or grasped. Is this hope based on a misperception of just how much influence Canada really has? This needs to be put to the test. This really brought home what my responsibility is as an elected member, as well as the collective responsibility of an elected House in a rich country, one that has an excellent reputation and a past legacy that could lead us to assume these responsibilities.

My constituents from that part of Africa told me that if Canada spoke to the Central African Republic, it would have a huge influence. The people there would listen to Canada, and whatever Canada said would be taken into consideration by the parties on the ground. I commend the Government of Canada for the financial assistance it has allocated in light of the conflict. However, beyond the numbers and the money allocated, there is unfortunately still room to criticize this government for its current approach to international aid, which has been clearly expressed based on our supposed or real national interests.

Beyond our capacity to be present as a diplomatic corps, as a country, there is this famous human factor of influence and good relations. They have significantly diminished, unfortunately, but such is the reality, to our great shame. I hope that we will not limit our involvement to just handing over some money. It is a kind gesture, but we have to do more than that. We have to extend our hand and have an individual and collective influence through our human presence and our excellent reputation.

I want to again thank all my colleagues for taking part in this committee of the whole, this take note debate. I hope this is not the end of the debate. I hope that this will inspire concrete action that will be much broader and much more comprehensive.

• (2340)

The Chair: It being 11:43 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53(1), the committee will rise and I will leave the Chair.

(Government Business No. 7 reported)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:43 p.m.)

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