



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 265 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 15, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled “A Global Fight: Supporting Efforts to Address Sex Trafficking in South Asia”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-398, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (medical inadmissibility—excessive demand).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is with a sense of duty and urgency that I rise in the House to table my bill which would repeal paragraph 38 (1)(c) of the IRPA.

Canada is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Paragraph 38(1)(c) directly contravenes this convention, allowing Canada's immigration system to discriminate against individuals with disabilities on the mere assumption an individual could pose an excessive burden on Canada's health or social services.

Following national media attention, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration studied this provision. It was made clear by witnesses, government members, and even the minister himself that this policy is out of step with Canadian values.

For two years, the minister has been consulting on this policy and has failed to act. Meanwhile, families like those of Monica Mateo and Marilyn Cruzet continue to suffer and wonder if their families will ever be reunited despite their contributions to this country by

caring for our seniors and children. It is simply unacceptable. Full repeal is the only option to go forward.

I call on the government to adopt my bill as its own and take immediate action on this urgent issue.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present three petitions to the House today, the first being on palliative care.

The petitioners acknowledge that 70% of Canadian residents that need end-of-life palliative care do not have access to it. They are calling on Parliament to support Bill C-277 to ensure that every Canadian that needs palliative care has access to it, and that palliative and hospice care do not hasten nor postpone death.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is with respect to sex selection. It highlights the importance of Parliament condemning the practice of sex selection.

The petitioners point out that all forms of gender-based violence should be condemned, including sex selection.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last petition I wish to present is in regard to impaired driving.

Families for Justice is a group of Canadians who have lost a loved one killed by an impaired driver. The petitioners believe that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient. They want the Prime Minister to keep his promise of introducing legislation that would make our roads safer.

The petitioners point out that 1,200 Canadians are killed every year by an impaired driver.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table two petitions.

The first is e-petition e-1269, which has over 1,000 signatures.

Business of Supply

I would like to acknowledge Laurie Gourlay, the originator of this petition, who sadly passed away last fall.

This petition acknowledges the Salish Sea as an ecologically, economically, and culturally rich area which provides critical marine habitat biodiversity and essential ecosystems that have as much importance to nature as the peoples, regions, and nations which reside along this unique ocean environment.

Canada has promised to meet its international commitment to honour the United Nations sustainable development goals by protecting 10% of our coastline by 2020 and there is growing momentum.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I wish to table today is from many people in my riding who support Bill C-262, which happily has passed the House. It is important to the people in my riding that the bill be fully implemented.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present a petition from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands who are concerned with the crisis of climate change. They are looking at the tremendous potential of energy efficiency within our homes, reducing waste from inefficient appliances, home design, and insulation. They urge the Government of Canada to work with the provinces to develop a new national building code with the goal of reducing overall energy demand to 15% of what our current built stock consumes.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC) moved:

That the House call on the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans for his insensitive comments at a recent town hall in Edmonton and show veterans the respect that they deserve by fulfilling his campaign promise to them, when he said on August 24, 2015, that “If I earn the right to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned”.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we often find ourselves tasked with debating very complex and difficult subjects in this place. However, we should not complain. After all, what greater honour is there than to be sent here by our fellow citizens to speak on their behalf? We do

not always rise to the occasion. We have all been guilty at some point of taking the easy road and reading talking points. We have all been guilty at some point of approaching an issue with partisan blinders on. We have all been guilty at some point of failing to acknowledge the value of an opposing view. As you have pointed out to me personally, Mr. Speaker, on more than one occasion, we have all been guilty of unnecessarily boisterous outbursts. I believe some call it heckling.

Today, we will be debating something far less complex and far more straightforward than what we often do. Today, we are debating whether the Prime Minister should do the honourable thing and apologize to veterans for breaking the promise he made to them.

The wording of the motion is unambiguous. It reads:

That the House call on the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans for his insensitive comments at a recent town hall in Edmonton and show veterans the respect that they deserve by fulfilling his campaign promise to them, when he said on August 24, 2015, that “If I earn the right to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned”.

The facts are clear. The Prime Minister's words were widely reported at the time. No one from the government side disputes that he said these words. In fact, they were repeated at rallies, on social media, and at doorsteps all over the land. It was an election, and promises had to be made. The Liberals might regret that the Prime Minister said these words. They might wish veterans would forget that the Prime Minister said these words. However, the Prime Minister did say these words, and veterans will not forget that he made that promise to them.

I have had the honour of giving voice to the aspirations of my riding of Brantford—Brant for nearly a decade now. Over the course of those years, if I have learned anything, it is that words matter. We should consider the oppressive regimes our valiant warriors have fought against. Nazis burned books, because words matter. The Taliban did the same. It closed schools and went about robbing young women of their ability to read, because words matter. North Korea continues to suppress free speech and the freedom of the press, because words matter.

Some may be thinking what I am doing. Surely I am not comparing the Liberals to Nazis. My hon. colleagues can rest assured that I am not. That might be how others prefer to slur their political opponents. However, that would be a gross injustice to those who suffered under that hideous regime, and I will not do that. I consider the members opposite to be honourable, and I know that they understand the importance of their own words. Canadians of all political persuasions have, for decades, willingly sacrificed everything to fight those oppressive regimes and defend the freedoms we enjoy.

Words matter. We call this place Parliament because it is where we gather as a nation to speak to one another. Canadians take people at their word because words matter. It is not just a quaint custom of a bygone era. Our word is our bond. “Honour” is a word, a word that those in uniform do not just throw around.

Business of Supply

If the answers we have been getting during question period are any indication of what we will hear from MPs on the government side today, then, sadly, we can expect a failure to rise to this occasion. I predict that MPs on the government side will be tempted to rise and tell us that all is well. They will be tempted to tell us how grateful all veterans should be.

●(1010)

The Liberals will be tempted to inflate dollar figures and omit that those figures are costed but not funded. They will be tempted to use imaginary examples of veterans and boast about how much that avatar will receive. They will be tempted to rhyme off lists of benefits, some of which are just pre-existing benefits that have been repackaged and renamed. They will be tempted to tell us that the Prime Minister has kept his promise, despite veterans and veterans' advocates saying, very loudly, that they have been betrayed. They will be tempted to ignore the fact that access to benefits has almost ground to a halt. There are 29,000 disability claims in the current backlog.

Without question, the Liberals will be tempted to attack the Conservatives' record in government, and why not? It is easier than taking responsibility for the Prime Minister's words. I hope I am wrong. I hope my hon. colleagues will resist the temptation to shift debate away from the subject at hand. I hope the first speaker on the government side simply rises in his or her place and states that the government supports the motion. I hope that the Prime Minister does not force government MPs to circle the wagons around him and just owns up to his words. We will see.

Again, the question today is a simple one. The question today is whether or not the Prime Minister should do the honourable thing and apologize to veterans for breaking his promise to them.

How did we get here? On August 24, 2015, at a campaign rally in Belleville, Ontario, the Prime Minister, flanked by smiling Liberal candidates, some of them veterans, some of them current government MPs, stated:

If I earn the right to serve this country as your prime minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned....

There were no caveats, no wiggle words, just a clear promise to veterans. The Liberal candidates who stood behind him that day clapped and smiled. Those in the audience also clapped. Some were heard cheering loudly. Why would they not? They, along with veterans across the country, were taking the Prime Minister at his word. The Prime Minister for his part paused with a smile and a twinkle of satisfaction in his eye, and basked in the glow of this adulation. It is clear from the videos online that he was quite pleased with himself, and it was clear which veterans he was referencing.

The Equitas Society had taken the previous government to court. That is a fact. There is no sense in pretending otherwise. What is also a fact is that the case was in abeyance when the Prime Minister spoke those words. The plaintiffs and the Conservative government were at the negotiating table and not fighting things out in court. It is also a fact that on May 16, 2016, the abeyance period expired without resolution when the justice minister wrote the B.C. Court of Appeal and stated that, in her view, and we can presume that this was

the view of the government and the Prime Minister, the court was now free to deliver judgment.

In other words, the government decided that it would force these veterans to fight their own government. Clearly, this is a promise broken. It is quite simple really. What else could anyone conclude? The Liberals took this decision less than nine months after the Prime Minister made his promise to veterans and, I would add, only six months after being sworn in, making it one of the very first decision the Liberals made.

How sincere was the Prime Minister that day in Belleville? Only he knows. They were his words. It was his bond. All we know for certain is that he has broken his promise. However, here is something else we know. In late 2016, while this group of veterans was being forced to fight the government in court, another group of veterans was bringing forward its case. This new class action case was being brought forward by female veterans who were fighting the government for a safe environment, free from sexual harassment.

●(1015)

Let me repeat that. The Liberal government is currently fighting women who have unselfishly heeded their country's call to service, because these women had the audacity to claim that they deserved to serve their country in a safe environment, free from sexual harassment. To be fair, it was not the government that launched the case, but how did it respond? Did it tell these veterans that their arguments are concerning and invite them to discuss a solution? No. Government lawyers argued that the government is not obligated and does not owe these women, these veterans, a duty of care to provide them with a safe and harassment-free environment.

When this came to light, the Prime Minister was quick to say that he had put justice department lawyers on notice, stating that the argument was of concern to him. He also asked the justice minister, the same justice minister who killed the negotiations with the Equitas Society veterans, to follow up with those lawyers to make sure that they argued things that are consistent with the government's philosophy. Again, these veterans are not being offered an abeyance or negotiations. The Prime Minister is going to keep the case going. He intends to defeat them in court, forcing them to fight their own government. This is a broken promise.

What is the government's philosophy vis-à-vis veterans? Perhaps the Prime Minister's comments to one of our disabled veterans at a recent town hall in Edmonton can shed some light on this.

Why is the government still fighting certain veterans' groups in court? According to the Prime Minister, they are asking for more than we can afford. However, it goes even deeper than that. Yesterday the Prime Minister voted against a private member's bill, sponsored by our colleague, the member for Barrie—Innisfil. The bill sought to ensure that veterans, their families, and survivors would be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. Is that really more than we can afford?

Business of Supply

Veterans and their duties are unique among Canadians. We have an obligation to care for veterans because of the sacrifices made by them. That obligation extends to the experiences of their families. The care, treatment, and transition of Canadian Armed Forces to civil life should be dealt with in a timely manner. Is that really more than we can afford?

The former minister of veterans affairs, the Hon. George Hees, a decorated Second World War veteran himself, was once quoted as saying, "When I was appointed Minister, I told all employees to remember three words: speed, generosity, and courtesy." That is not a complicated formula: speed, generosity, courtesy. To that list I would add honesty. I think if you ask most veterans they'll tell you that speed, generosity, courtesy, and honesty add up to respect.

Recently in Victoria, I was privileged to join my caucus colleagues and veterans at a veterans round table. These were people who had served and who now advocate for other veterans and assist them in their dealings with Veterans Affairs Canada. We had a fairly lengthy discussion about the issues that they were facing, but the word "respect" was repeated over and over again. At the very end when we were wrapping up, one of the veterans' wives reminded us of that word one more time when she said to us, "If you have heard anything, please remember one word, and that is respect."

Perhaps it is time to start listening closer to the words of veterans and veterans' advocates. Their words matter.

Don Sorochan, lead counsel for the Equitas Society said, "The position taken by the government was astonishing. For them to stand up and say we don't have any special obligation to veterans was completely contrary to everything they had been saying in Parliament, on the election campaign".

• (1020)

Mark Campbell, a veteran, a double amputee who lost his legs from the knee down in Afghanistan, and a member of the Minister of Veterans Affairs' very own policy advisory group, said, "The new pension for life is nothing more than a shell game." Sean Bruyey, another veteran and veterans advocate, said that "the government merely resurrected ghosts of Christmases past with a hodgepodge of benefits that amount to recycled, remodelled and repackaged programs that already exist."

Another said, "It's fair to say the disappointment (with the new plan) has been immense because it just didn't do the trick.... If you're going to make a promise to provide lifetime pensions, then do it." Those words were spoken by Brian Forbes, the executive director of War Amps Canada and chairman of the National Council of Veterans Associations of Canada.

For four days now, Colin Saunders, a veteran, has been camped just outside this building to raise awareness for homeless veterans. Today, he has been joined by other veterans as they protest their treatment by Veterans Affairs. He describes his dealings with the current government as "combat". Let that sink in. He says it is "combat" with a government led by a Prime Minister who promised them they would not have to fight their own government. These are not the words of partisans. These are not the government's political opponents. These are the words of veterans, veterans' spouses, and

veterans' advocates. Their only purpose is to ensure veterans are treated with the dignity and respect they have earned.

Let us try to remember that today this is not about comparing records. I ask the government to avoid the temptation to rise and tell us all is well. It is not. Prove me wrong. Resist the temptation to shift debate away from the subject at hand.

Today is about answering a simple question, and that is whether the Prime Minister should do the honourable thing and apologize to veterans for breaking the promise he made to them. On this side, we say he cannot afford not to do so.

• (1025)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I stand to ask a question of the member, I would like to give a shout-out to my local Canadian legions, Branch 112 and Branch 152 in Brooklin and Whitby.

I will agree that we can do better, but when I was canvassing, the veterans in my riding of Whitby asked the government to change the lump sum into a pension for life, which we did. The member opposite said that words matter, but we believe that actions matter even more. When we made the investments in our veterans, when we opened offices, when we decided that we were going to hire new staff in order to expedite, to honour the speed the member opposite talked about, and to make the investments in terms of generosity, we have done that with our actions. We spoke to veterans around the country and honoured the speed, generosity, and respect that he is referring to.

I would ask the hon. member how the previous Harper government honoured speed, generosity, and respect when it made cuts, closed offices, and let the veterans charter wither.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, the first question in this debate leads to exactly what I had hoped would not happen, which is the loss of focus on the fact of what the Prime Minister did to veterans, particularly Brock Blaszczyk, an amputee in Edmonton who, at a town hall, asked the Prime Minister why he had broken his promise. The Prime Minister looked back at him and said the government is fighting veterans in court because it does not have the money, that there is not enough.

Business of Supply

There is enough for the government to do other things, which I am sure will come out in this debate today, but if what we are going to do here today is to honour the dignity and respect that the member says they are showing through their actions, then show it. Why are the veterans not cheering because the government has kept its promise? They are not doing that. They are on the front steps of Parliament today. There will be hundreds of them out there, saying they are having to fight the government for the benefits that they earned—

• (1030)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry. I have to allow for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Brantford—Brant for tabling this motion today. It is very important that we talk about our failure to deliver services to vets. When I say “our”, I mean as a nation, because everyone has a responsibility to look after our veterans.

We are hearing the Conservatives blaming the Liberals for not fulfilling their promises, and Liberals pointing to the Conservatives' track record of not delivering to veterans. We all have to agree here that we have not done enough. Right now, we have veterans on the steps of Parliament who are suffering. They are falling through the cracks. They are waiting for their claims to be opened. That is not good enough. These are the people and their families who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of everyday Canadians.

The motion talks about the Prime Minister's promise. He said, “If I earn the right to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned”. The Prime Minister has not honoured this promise.

Perhaps the member could talk about Mr. Błaszczuk, in Edmonton, and the court case *Equitas* has launched. It started with the Conservative government, so there has to be an answer from the Conservatives as to why it started there and why they tabled this motion today. There is some responsibility there.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, as I referred to in my speech, we worked with *Equitas* to negotiate a settlement to put the lawsuit in abeyance. That was the status at the time of the election campaign.

It was in abeyance for the first six months of this government's regime. It consciously decided, the Minister of Justice decided, to go back to court and not to the negotiating table with the *Equitas* people. Those are the true facts. No one can dispute them.

On the issue of what really matters here today, what really matters are veterans and their families, who, through the words of the Prime Minister during the campaign and his words in the town hall, have been disrespected. He should do the honourable thing and apologize to veterans.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary made a comment about actions speaking louder than words. I want to go over some of the actions of the Liberal government.

Instead of helping our veterans, who the Prime Minister told are asking for too much money, here are some of the government's actions: \$250,000 wasted on the Prime Minister's trip to billionaire island; \$8 million wasted on a hockey rink on Parliament Hill; \$10 million for the payout to Omar Khadr; \$250 billion to the Chinese communist government for its investment bank to build pipelines in Asia; \$15 million in bonuses to staff executives responsible for the Phoenix fiasco; and \$33 million in taxpayers' money for Bombardier bonuses.

I would like to ask my colleague if these are the actions the government should be exhibiting, or perhaps the actions should be focusing on our veterans and not on wasting taxpayers' money.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, my colleague brings up the fact that the government seems to have unlimited funds to do all the things he has mentioned, plus, at the same time, run record deficits in the country. The Prime Minister promised Canadians he would run a modest deficit, but again, it was a broken promise, because it is quadruple, or more, what he promised.

At the town halls and round tables I have done with veterans, in my role as critic, they constantly bring up these comparisons. This is proof of the disrespect shown by the government and the Prime Minister.

• (1035)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I had the privilege of serving in the Canadian Forces for just over three years, and one of the things I took a great deal of pride in was the amount of time I was able to spend with World War II vets on parades and so forth.

No one needs to tell me about a lack of respect for the vets. I appreciate the sacrifices they have made. The government appreciates the sacrifices that have been made. Actions speak louder than words, and there have been many actions in favour of ensuring that there is better compensation. There is always room for improvement.

Would my colleague across the way not recognize that year over year, in terms of Conservative versus Liberal budgets, there are hundreds of millions of dollars more going to veterans today than there were under Stephen Harper.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, not going into the weeds of comparison between governments, I can say that when the Conservatives were in government, there was a 35% increase in the funding for programs, per veteran, in the years we held the file.

Business of Supply

I will not dispute that the Liberal government is putting money into programs. You are, but as the veterans I have quoted today have said, you are not hitting the mark. We have a Prime Minister who stood in front of a veteran, an amputee who lost a leg and has only 20% use of the other one, and told him that the government does not have enough money. That is what we are debating today. It is that lack of respect.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Brantford—Brant, who has been around for a long time, that he is to address the questions and comments to the Chair and not to the individuals who are asking the questions in the House.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be here today to talk about something that is near and dear to me, our veterans.

The Government of Canada's support for Canadian Armed Forces members, for veterans, and for their families starts at recruitment, continues throughout their careers, and extends throughout their lives.

We owe an immeasurable debt to our veterans, to the fallen, and to the families who love them.

These words were from our Prime Minister, this November, who went on to say:

Just as our servicemen and women have taken care of us, we must also take care of them. It is our sacred duty as a country to be there for our heroes when they need us most.

Words count, but it is actions that matter most. Our Prime Minister did indeed make several promises to veterans, and to all Canadians, and we have been working hard to deliver on them. Since coming into office, our government has delivered on many commitments made in the campaign and given to the Minister of Veterans Affairs in his mandate letter.

We increased compensation for pain and suffering by increasing the disability award from a maximum of \$310,000 to \$360,000. We made retroactive payments to 67,000 veterans under the new veterans charter. We increased income replacement from 75% of a veteran's pre-release salary to 90%.

[*Translation*]

We reopened the nine Veterans Affairs Canada offices that had been closed, thereby restoring veterans' access to services in Corner Brook, Brandon, Sidney, Kelowna, Saskatoon, Charlottetown, Thunder Bay, Windsor, and Prince George. For example, the Kelowna office reopened in 2016, adding eight new front-line employees to improve access to Veterans Affairs Canada services for veterans and their families in the province. The new office serves some 3,500 veterans and enables approximately 100 veterans to meet with their case manager in person. We also opened a new office in Surrey. It serves about 7,500 veterans and enables some 206 veterans to meet with their case manager in person.

• (1040)

[*English*]

We created a brand new education benefit that will give up to \$80,000 to Canadian Armed Forces members to go back to school

once they have served a certain number of years. We are investing in families by expanding access to all 32 military family resource centres. I have had the great pleasure of visiting a dozen of them across this country.

As the proud mother of two Canadian Armed Forces members, I am grateful that these resources are there for them. In two years we have implemented many of the changes veterans asked for.

The member for Barrie—Innisfil said it best when he said, “The previous government had lost and had become disconnected with veterans, lost a lot of the trust.” He called it a fair criticism, and I will take him at his word.

This December, we announced one of our key promises. The Prime Minister was clear in his mandate letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs:

Re-establish lifelong pensions as an option for our injured Veterans, while ensuring that every injured Veteran has access to financial advice and support so that they can determine the form of compensation that works best for them and their families.

We did this.

The pension for life is based on three pillars. The first is a monthly tax-free payment for life up to a maximum of \$1,150 per month to recognize pain and suffering. Veterans experiencing severe barriers to returning to civilian life could be eligible for the second pillar, which is the additional pain and suffering compensation, to a maximum of \$1,500 a month, tax free, for life. This equals \$2,650, tax free, for life. The third pillar is income replacement, where we streamlined economic benefits, to make them more accessible, into a monthly payment of 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary.

We understand that this can sound complicated and abstract, but let us take, for example, a corporal who served six years in the Canadian Armed Forces and suffered a 100% disability. She would now be entitled to nearly \$6,000 a month in benefits. This veteran could also be eligible for nearly \$72,000 through the critical injury benefit, \$40,000 to go back to school, and additional finances to modify her vehicle and home to meet her needs. On top of that, and perhaps most importantly, she would be eligible for vocational rehabilitation, career transition services to help her find a job and to help educate her employer about her needs, and a network of 4,000 registered mental health providers and a wellness system to help her find her new normal in civilian life.

With the income replacement benefit, veterans may also earn up to \$20,000 a year before any reductions would be made, encouraging them to engage in activities meaningful to them.

Business of Supply

It is also worth pointing out that this new plan takes survivors and dependent children into account as well. We understand that veterans need to know that their immediate family will be looked after financially.

With pension for life, in the event of a veteran's service-related death before the age of 65, the survivor and dependent children would receive the same income replacement benefit amount as the veteran would have until he or she reached the age of 65. The survivors and dependent children would then receive 70% of the benefit to which the veteran would have been entitled after 65, and this would continue for life.

Additionally, if a veteran is receiving the pain and suffering compensation at the time of her or his death, any outstanding amount would be cashed out to the survivors and dependent children. If a veteran was eligible for pain and suffering compensation but had not applied for this benefit, his or her survivors and/or dependent children may apply and receive a lump-sum amount.

While we understand that well-being is about more than dollars and cents, we also understand that financial stability is critical. That is why we are holding round tables with veterans and stakeholders across the country. That is why the six ministerial advisory groups were formed in the early days of this mandate. Throughout, we have maintained an open-door policy with veterans. We want to ensure veterans and their families fully understand the scope and impacts of changes we are introducing and to hear from them.

However, let me back up a bit.

The needs of Canada's veterans have changed significantly over the past century. Since the Pension Act was introduced in 1919, our programs and services have evolved to meet the changing needs of veterans.

By the 2000s, the Pension Act benefits were not meeting the financial security needs of many veterans. Yes, it was a monthly payment in recognition of pain and suffering but it did not always support veterans' getting back to work or to whatever gave them purpose in the years after their release from the Canadian Armed Forces. We also know that our service men and women who served in recent conflicts like Afghanistan had many different needs and that the Pension Act did not address those needs.

That is why the new veterans charter was brought in, with unanimous support of all parties, but even then it was supposed to be a living document. It was supposed to adapt to the emerging needs of our modern-day veterans and their families. Unfortunately, the previous government did not listen to those needs and it did not listen to the veterans who were asking for those changes to the new veterans charter.

In 2015, the same veteran whom we talked about earlier would have received a lump sum of \$310,000. She could apply for five different income replacement benefits, each with their own eligibility criteria and application forms. Even then, instead of 90% of her pre-release salary, she would have only received 75%. She would receive \$4,500 less in caregiver benefits. She would still have access to vocational rehabilitation but career transition would be a \$1,000 grant to help write a resume instead of comprehensive assistance. Let us hope she did not live in one of those nine communities where a

Veterans Affairs office was closed, because then she would have a hard time getting someone on the phone after the government cut front-line workers.

We were out there. I was out there, at the MFRCs in Val-Cartier, Oromocto, Winnipeg, Kingston, Nova Scotia, on base and off, talking to military members, veterans, and their families across our great land, those who were critically injured and those with varying degrees of illness and injury. We asked them what they needed with respect to financial supports and benefits and services to help them re-establish in post-military life. Every week my office and I speak to veterans, serving members, and their families. I hear some of their frustrations, their concerns, their questions. Those conversations are what drive me to continue to improve our benefits and services. It is what drives us all.

● (1045)

I also fully understand there are concerns about timelines, so I would like to elaborate.

There are two reasons why it will take until April 2019 to fully implement the new pension for life. The teacher in me would like to explain further.

First, we need to ensure that all Veterans Affairs Canada staff, systems, and processes are properly in place to efficiently deliver the new pension for life to the more than 74,000 veterans it will impact. Until it comes into effect, veterans will continue to receive the current benefits and services for which they are eligible.

Second, the pension for life changes need to be finalized through government legislation and, as we all know here, that takes time. That is unfortunately the one thing I have learned in my short time here on the Hill: change takes time. I know veterans and their families have been overly patient, and I thank them for their patience and I wish I could make things go faster.

Between now and the projected start date of April 1, 2019, the department will ensure that front-line staff are being trained to handle additional questions and to help guide veterans and their families through the process of transition to or applying for the pension for life. In the meantime, we are continuing to work in implementing many of the initiatives that we put forward in budget 2017, which come into effect this April.

Business of Supply

We know that every veteran has a unique story and situation, which is why the pension for life is designed to allow veterans to decide what form of compensation works best for them and their families as they make that transition from the Canadian Armed Forces to their post-military life. The needs of one veteran and his or her family could be completely different from the veteran living on the other side of the country, or even the one living right next door. We need to ensure that they are all supported in every aspect of their lives, financially, professionally, emotionally, and physically based on their own needs and also understanding that these needs change throughout their lives.

That is why the programs, benefits, and services that veterans and their families asked for and that we are bring forward have to be nimble.

Let me give the example of a Canadian Armed Forces member who releases from the Canadian Armed Forces and a few years later realizes his knees are bad. He goes to the doctor and realizes that having jumped out of a helicopter for 20 years as a Canadian Armed Forces member, it is normal that his knees may be shot. He applies for benefits through Veterans Affairs Canada and starts receiving those benefits. A few years later he decides he would like to change his career path and comes back to Veterans Affairs Canada for the new training and education benefit so he can go back to school and start a new career. Unfortunately, some things like PTSD manifest years later, so if he presents with PTSD, he can come back and ask for more help. When he needs us, we will be there.

While the government is working through that legislative process to implement the new pension for life, the Minister of Veterans Affairs and I are already always meeting face-to-face with veterans and their families across the country to talk about the new programs, discuss some challenges and opportunities, and ensure veterans' questions and concerns are being addressed.

As I said earlier, I will always listen to veterans. I have learned so much from them over the past two years and I am so thankful for their willingness to reach out and share their stories. They, and their families, are what drive me to do better.

Veterans have been asking for years for changes and improvements in the new veterans charter and it will take time to implement those changes. In the two years since the election, we have essentially been flying the plane at the same time that we have been building it. We opened the VAC offices and hired more than 450 employees to serve our veterans and their families. Combined with over \$6 billion in initiatives that we announced in budgets 2016 and 2017, we have invested an additional \$3.6 billion into this flexible package of benefits and programs. Again, I wish it could be faster. We can always do better and we will continue to do better.

We need to better communicate with veterans to ensure they are aware of what they are aware of what they are eligible for and we need to truly treat the new veterans charter like a living document and adjust it to the realities of ill and injured members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families. We need to get faster at providing responses to our veterans and address the backlog.

● (1050)

Veterans and their families have earned Canada's respect and gratitude. Our government is giving back to those who have given so much in services to all Canadians.

I want to explain to people why I decided to run for federal office.

As I have said, I have two sons serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. I will be honest that I was frustrated and angry, like many military families. I felt as if the government was not listening, and I could either stay quiet or I could get involved. I was worried that if one of my sons became ill or injured, would Canada be there for him?

As my two sons serve in the Canadian Armed Forces, and as my husband and father were firefighters, unfortunately PTSD has a chair at my kitchen table. I wish veterans did not need our services. I wish they never became ill or injured, but that is not reality. However, I want them to know that if they do, we will be there. I will be there.

Earlier today, veterans came to advocate on behalf of their comrades in arms, right outside here. I applauded them for that, and I will be outside to listen to them shortly.

We have a lot of work to do as a government and as a nation to rebuild the trust that was broken. Many veterans and their families are still hurting, and they are frustrated. I meet with them every chance I get. I speak with them, I listen, and I read their social media posts. I have met with our incredible veterans at Ste. Anne's Hospital in my home province, and I again thank them for reaching out. Their stories and, more important, their suggestions help me in making decisions every day.

In listening to the veterans who have reached out to all of us, one thing comes out loud and clear. Veterans and their families, and Canadians are really tired of the partisanship. So am I. While we can stand here and make claims of who treated veterans better, who did what or does what to help them, how does that achieve our objective to help veterans in need? It does not. It helps politicians. It helps for content and clips for social media sites to help fuel claims. I will not do it.

I ask members of the House to please stop this. Let us use our energies and come together for our common cause. Let us work together to get the timelines down. Let us collaborate on how to make that transition easier. Let us share those best practices. Let us focus our energies on what is really important: those brave men and women outside today, those who proudly wore that Canadian flag on their shoulders like my sons do.

Business of Supply

We have come a long way in supporting our veterans, but there is still so much to do. We need to make that transition between the Canadian Armed Forces and civilian life seamless. However, all members in the House and any veterans or family members listening today should rest assured that I will never cease in my efforts to improve their lives.

I know veterans have heard it all before. Why should they believe me now? I stand in the House and I ask all veterans and Canadians listening today to let me show them. Let me give them a reason to believe.

• (1055)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her two sons who provide a great service to our country.

This debate today is about insensitive comments made to a veteran in Edmonton based on promises the Prime Minister made.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member talks about partisanship. We had an opportunity last night, when we debated a bill I introduced, Bill C-378, for all of the House to come together and recognize the sacred obligation that we as a government and Canadian people had to our veterans, and to enshrine those principles of a military covenant and the sacred obligation into the Veterans Affairs Act through amendments I proposed. The government side, including the member with two sons, voted against Bill C-378.

Therefore, if the intent is to truly cast aside partisanship in this place, why did the member not support the amendments I proposed yesterday?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. As he is a former firefighter, I thank him for his service to his community.

What the member opposite did not mention is that I met with him in my office on November 21, regarding Bill C-378. I asked him many questions regarding the bill, such as how we would measure timeliness, because what would be timely for one may not be timely for others, and how we would measure dignity and respect. I asked him about the social covenant that the U.K. uses and how it has been implemented. I asked him to work with me. If the objective is to increase timeliness and support our veterans, I asked him to work with me, to stand shoulder to shoulder, and do it together. I asked him to come back to me. I stood in this very House on December 1 to debate Bill C-378. I asked him to work with me. I never heard back.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech and, to reiterate what my colleague from Barrie—Innisfil said, to honour her sons as well. I thank her for bringing their voices here and for the service they do for all Canadians.

The member talked about the sacred covenant. She talked about my colleague's bill, which we voted for and the government voted against yesterday. This was not just his bill. It was a promise the current government made in the last election, which was to recognize the sacred covenant to veterans. It has failed to do that. The government has asked my colleague to justify it. However, it was a

promise it made. It is the government that needs to explain why it failed to deliver that.

Right now we know that the government made several promises in the last campaign. They made promises to increase benefits to veterans. Those benefits are far short of what those veterans expected. We have veterans outside right now, lined up next to the \$8 million temporary hockey rink in front of Parliament Hill, to raise awareness about what it is like to be left out in the cold with respect to their benefits and how they are being treated. At the same time, we are debating a motion that is calling for the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans, because he said that he cannot afford to give veterans what he promised them. It would be good today if the Prime Minister went outside and apologized to those veterans. It would save us a lot of time. Maybe the member could speak to that.

• (1100)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I want to clarify that with respect to some of the items that were in Bill C-378, timeliness, dignity, and respect are already part of the Veterans Bill of Rights. That is why putting it into legislation was not appropriate.

My colleague is a new member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to work with him on veterans affairs. He is very passionate about it. I look forward to continuing to work with him. With respect to his question, I think we have demonstrated our commitment. When he said that we have not increased benefits, we have increased the earnings loss benefit or pre-release salary from 75% to 90%. We have been in office for two years. We have made great strides, with close to \$10 billion in dedicated new funding for veterans. There is still so much more we can be doing. We need to work together to ensure that the veterans who have served us so valiantly continue to be served.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her speech, for sharing her story, and I thank her sons for their service, as well as all veterans.

You have listened to veterans, and their families in particular, across the country.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the parliamentary secretary to address her questions and comments to the Chair.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Speaker, we have heard the member's story. She has listened to veterans across the country, and their families in particular. I want to ask the hon. member what she thinks we can do to do more. What gold standards or best practices has she heard of that we can do to better serve and to honour our sacred commitment to our veterans?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I have indeed spoken to veterans and I continue to speak to veterans on a weekly basis.

Business of Supply

The veterans affairs committee has recently completed a study with respect to comparisons of the services and benefits that Canada has against our Five Eyes and other countries to learn best practices, who is doing what, because many other countries are facing the same issues that we are facing here in Canada in terms of supports to veterans who have bravely served. It is important that we listen. However, we cannot use a cookie-cutter approach, because what may work in one country may not work here.

Most importantly, we need to listen to veterans because they are incredibly knowledgeable and provide us with so much information in terms of suggestions. Imagine if we are able to actually come together and work together to create change, finally, in support of our veterans. That is the important thing. They have a lot of the answers and we need to listen.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find that rich coming from the hon. member. I am going to take offence to what she said earlier with her accusation that I did not work with her on this legislation. In fact, I did meet with the hon. member and she did mention some concerns, namely, how we define a “timely” manner.

Had the bill been sent to committee we could have worked out a lot of those details. The committee could have done its work. Witnesses could have come from Veterans Affairs Canada. The minister could have appeared and spoken about this. She suggested that it was somehow my fault that the bill did not move forward. Every single member on this side of the House, including New Democrats and every other opposition party, voted to support the bill that recognized these principles of a sacred obligation.

Why did that member not support that?

• (1105)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I am in no way accusing the member opposite of not wanting to work with me. I am simply stating the facts. I am simply stating that I met with him on November 21 and had concerns and that did not come back to me.

However, what I have said, and what I will continue to say, and as I have constantly demonstrated in my two years here, is that I am willing to work with any member of the House in terms of our veterans, our military members, and the families that support them.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have worked with the parliamentary secretary and I absolutely know her deep passion and commitment to veterans.

However, this is a slightly different end of the veterans spectrum. The Liberal Party committed some time ago to eliminating something that dates from the Boer War, which eliminates pension benefits to the spouses of those who have remarried after the age of 60.

With the budget coming up so soon, could I have an indication from the parliamentary secretary if she will work across party lines to end this anachronistic and very unfair provision that affects our veterans?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, the clawback after 60 years of age clause that my colleague is referring to is something that we are absolutely looking at. Obviously, I cannot tell her what is

going to be in the budget that will be coming out in two weeks, but obviously it is something that we are absolutely looking at.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for North Island—Powell River, who is a strong advocate for veterans. I want to thank her for her hard work on the veterans file. I also want to thank the member for Brantford—Brant for tabling today's motion.

Before I get started, I want to recognize the veterans who are standing outside. Their voices are very important today. “Left out in the cold” is their theme today. It is about veterans falling through the cracks.

I want to thank my colleague from the Liberal Party who spoke previous to me for talking about imagining us not playing politics on this issue. I do not think any of us want to be playing politics or talking politics when it comes to our veterans. What veterans want is what was promised to them. They want the service they expect.

There are 29,000 veterans waiting right now for their disability claim to be processed. That is a 50% increase over the last eight months. When we talk about not being political and not playing political games, it is really tough when we hear, from the government side, its boisterous announcements and its boisterous rhetoric around how it is treating veterans, when veterans cannot get the service for the things it is announcing. If the veterans cannot get service, the benefits do not matter if they cannot access them.

New Democrats and Canadians love and respect our veterans. We thank them and their families for their selfless service and sacrifice. I really want to underscore their families, because they were really left out in the cold in the recent announcements and promises the government has made.

The events of the Prime Minister's Edmonton town hall, the meeting of February 1, left many of us confused, bewildered, and angry. This is, after all, a Prime Minister who during the last election made two specific promises to Canada's veterans: to re-establish lifelong pensions, and to ensure that no veteran would ever be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they deserve.

What we know is that the Liberal leader, the Prime Minister has completely reneged on those commitments to Canada's veterans. What happened in Edmonton is that he was called out for breaking those promises by retired corporal Brock Blaszczyk, a brave gentleman who, as we know, has both the courage to fight and defend the interests of Canada in an armed war zone, and to confront our Prime Minister for failing him and his colleagues. We salute his courage on both accounts and we thank him very much.

I would like to read some of Mr. Blaszczyk's question and the Prime Minister's response into the record. Mr. Blaszczyk said:

Business of Supply

...on August 24, 2015, you made the promise, and I'll quote it here: "No veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned". Yet you are still currently in a legal battle with veterans regarding equal support and compensation to their peers. ...we have two standards of veterans...the ones prior to 2006 and the ones after...one under the old pension act and one under this new lump sum...option....

My question is what veterans were you talking about? ...honestly, Mr. Prime Minister, I was prepared to be injured in the line of duty when I joined the military.... I was prepared to be killed in action. What I wasn't prepared for, Mr. Prime Minister, is Canada turning its back on me.

In response, the Prime Minister said:

Thank you for your passion and your strength, and for being here today to share this justifiable frustration and anger with me and all of us here.... First of all, why are we still fighting against certain veterans' groups in court? Because they are asking for more than we are able to give right now.... Hang on. You are asking for honest answers.

We know that the Prime Minister said this and veterans across our country had to hear this. This is when the government is spending lots of money, including an \$8 million hockey rink outside that will not be used by most Canadians and certainly not most veterans. This is when CEOs on Bay Street are getting stock option loopholes that cost taxpayers almost \$1 billion, and the Prime Minister is telling veterans that he cannot fulfill his election promise.

Here we are today. We have a Liberal leader who makes bold new promises to address a massive social injustice. The Canadians who desperately need this assistance buy into this and elect the Liberals to govern, take photos with the Liberal members while they are campaigning, and then once they are elected the Liberal government fundamentally changes its position and abandons its promises.

• (1110)

At one time, the love and respect felt by Canadians for our veterans and their families was clear and obvious in their treatment by the government. Lifelong pensions, the creation of Wartime Housing Limited, which my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands talked about, and complete coverage for all disabilities incurred during service were some of the ways this love was shown to veterans by the government on behalf of Canadians.

Indeed, it is widely agreed that at one point in time the government firmly believed that it had a "sacred obligation" to care for our veterans and their families in exchange for their selfless sacrifice. We voted for this last night, in the bill tabled by my colleague from Barrie—Innisfil, but the Liberals voted against it. This obligation was a clear acknowledgement that when women or men entered into the service of our country and put their health and lives on the line for us, the government would be there to care for them for the rest of their lives. I say that we believed that "at one point in time", because I am no longer sure this is the case.

The Harper Conservative government made an effort to modernize the rights, services, and benefits provided to Canada's veterans, but it inadvertently made life worse for many. The lump sum payment option for veterans was certainly one of the worst policies brought forward. In the interest of full disclosure, the NDP voted in support of the new veterans charter when it was brought before the House.

However, the difference between us and the Conservatives is that once problems became obvious, such as the lump sum payment option, we proposed to fix those issues. Unfortunately the Conservatives and their ministers of veterans affairs quite literally

turned their backs on those in need by not supporting the need to reverse that.

Now, for his part, the Prime Minister made lofty goals, as we know, and raised expectations so high for so many people in need, including veterans. However, it is now obvious that those crisp and clear Liberal promises were designed for a quick headline and to trick Canadians into voting for a progressive agenda that the Liberals had no intention of implementing once in power.

The New Democrats will always work with other parties, and we are here to do that today, in the best interests of veterans. To do so, we must commit to remembering the past, not erasing it. We must never forget our collective failings as a society and government. It is all of our responsibility to take care of and look after veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange, nuclear radiation, and other lethal and debilitating toxins and agents over the course of their service; the horrific sexual trauma that has been endured by many military personnel, particularly women, over the course of their military service; the serious psychiatric side-effects associated with the use of the anti-malarial drug mefloquine; the widespread prevalence of operational stress injury; post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychological challenges faced by active and retired armed forces personnel; and the unconscionable transition gap, which I alluded to earlier, which denies benefits to many veterans who transition from active duty to civilian life.

A particularly stark example of how the governments have changed the way they serve veterans is with housing.

Wartime Housing Limited was created after World War II to transfer 30,000 affordable homes to veterans. However, at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs this week, we heard that as many as 5,000 veterans were homeless and living on our streets today, like our friends Trevor Sanderson and Dick Groot, who are here visiting and have been camping out just a couple of blocks from here to raise awareness around this issue. In addition, there are the unintended and negative consequences experienced by veterans as a result of changes under the new veterans charter.

The Equitas lawsuit, which seeks to re-establish the old lifelong pension regime, began under the Harper Conservatives, whose defence in court was to argue that the Government of Canada had no sacred obligation to take care of our veterans who were injured while defending our country and interests. It was a shameful line of defence taken by the last government and former ministers of veterans affairs, who sit here today and complain that the Liberal government is treating veterans exactly the same way they did.

Business of Supply

What is clear today is that the Liberal government, like the Conservative government before, has failed to live up to its promises to veterans. The New Democrats will not allow the Liberal Prime Minister to adopt the shameful legacy of the last Conservative prime minister without answering to our veterans and Canadians. We hope the Liberals will do that today, with a different tone. Instead of just this boisterous attitude of all these announcements, apologizing to veterans for the comments made by the Prime Minister would be the right thing to do. He owes that apology to retired Corporal Blaszyk and all veterans. An apology is clearly needed, and that is why we will support the motion.

• (1115)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear different sides of the House say that they want to make this non-partisan, that they want to try to get all members onside in support of our vets. As someone who has marched with vets in many parades, as someone who served for over three years in the Canadian forces, it is encouraging to hear that.

However, what I do not hear is the recognition that there has been a substantial difference over the last couple of years. Hundreds of millions of additional dollars are going toward vets and programming for them. There is no acknowledgement whatsoever of that. The system has improved significantly. Is there room for more improvement? There absolutely is. I would like to think all members would like to see that improvement made as quickly as possible. Is improving the system not the most important thing? That is what we should be debating today.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for bringing forward the fact that there have been some changes and some positive decisions made by the government, such as reopening veterans offices. We all raised concerns about that with the Liberals and with the last government. We were concerned about veterans getting access to services.

I appreciate the member raising concern about how we are far from delivering what we need to deliver for veterans. That is so important. That will take the partisanship out of how we can move forward. Too often I hear the Liberals say that they are delivering so much to veterans and things are so much better for them. However, when we speak to veterans and when they cannot access the services the government has made announcements about, then it does not matter how much money the government is spending.

I want to thank the member for reaching out and acknowledging that we and the government are falling short.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the member in answer to the previous question. That is at the core of this. During his speech, the member talked about how the Liberal Party made commitments during the election and had not delivered on any of them. However, the government has delivered on a number of commitments.

The member talked about services and access to services. Nine veterans offices have been reopened. More lifetime pensions have been implemented. More money has been put into this. Can we do more? Absolutely. We should always strive to do more, in particular for our veterans.

Could the member not at least acknowledge the fact that there have been significant improvements since the previous government? That is all the previous member asked. I, too, am seeking to get some clarification on that.

• (1120)

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I just acknowledged that the government had made some steps, but it is far short of its promise. The Liberals promised to reinstate lifelong pensions. The pensions they announced in December will not even be implemented until April 2019, almost four years after they were elected, and falling short of what they promised. Veterans and their families will get less than they did in 2006.

Also, the government promised it would have a sacred obligation to our veterans. The Liberals did not do that. They voted against that last night. They promised not to fight veterans in court, but they are doing that right now. They are fighting the people who have put their lives on the line for our country. Twenty-nine thousand veterans are waiting for disability benefits, a 50% increase over the last eight months.

The Liberals can announce as much as they want, but when veterans cannot get services and those services are less than they were promised, then it is not enough.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Courtenay—Alberni, our spokesperson on Veterans Affairs, for his passion and dedication to this issue. As we share a region, we know what veterans are experiencing in our area, and across Canada.

A great honour for me, in my role as member of parliament for North Island—Powell River, is the fact that I represent 19 Wing Comox. I have spent many times on the base, looking, learning, and listening to military members there. They do so much to protect people across our region, our country, and the world. Right now many people are overseas doing the important work the government has asked them to do. Their families are waiting for them to come home. Every day, they pray and hope they will come home safe and well, which is not always the case.

Another wonderful experience for me is in my role in the NATO parliamentary assembly. We travel to different countries and meet with other NATO countries. We talk about what is happening in the world. What I hear again and again is the deep respect that so many countries have for our men and women in uniform, and the work they do. It is quite amazing to travel and meet people who talk about how our military members are so brave. They say that they stand by them and fight every day for peace. They are so appreciative for what they have brought to their countries and how they have worked with their countries to support peace across the world.

When I think about what we are debating today, I am devastated that we are having this conversation.

The motion reads:

Business of Supply

That the House call on the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans for his insensitive comments at a recent town hall in Edmonton and show veterans the respect that they deserve by fulfilling his campaign promise to them, when he said on August 24, 2015, that 'If I earn the right to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned'.

In the last election, veterans across my riding clearly told me that they were devastated by the realities they faced. They felt immensely betrayed by the former government and what had happened in their relationship to veterans.

One of the most powerful moments for me during the election was coming across some signs in one of my communities. Veterans had built them and put them in front of the Conservative candidate signs. It outlined, in detail, the betrayal they had experienced. That is so important. When we were all out campaigning, we heard again and again from veterans who felt profoundly betrayed. They had faithfully gone and done exactly what our country had asked them to do. They came home and were treated terribly.

In the last few months, we have also seen something tragic in our riding office, with veterans coming through our doors, veterans who had a lot of hope. They had been waiting patiently to give the government a little time to set things up. They were facing some distance challenges being part of a rural riding, not having quite the level of services they needed to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder and other health concerns. They were going to give the government some time, but expected to see some fundamental changes. They wanted that sense of value, having served the country. However, over the last several months, more and more veterans have come into the our offices. It is really sad for me, and for the people who work for me, to see how devastated a lot of those veterans are. They have waited, they have been patient, but they nothing has changed for them.

It is important remember that during the last election, the Prime Minister said, "We will also make new and significant investments to meet the sacred obligation that we have to our veterans." That was part of the Liberal messaging.

• (1125)

Many veterans felt hopeful for that, and now my office hears regularly from veterans that they thought this was a sacred obligation, and things were going to change. They had hope, and now they are having to face reality. We have now heard that veterans will have to wait until April 2019 to choose between the existing lump sum and a new lifelong pension that, when all is said and done, will pay less than half of the pre-2006 pension. This is a very deep betrayal.

Three veterans came to me when they heard about this motion, and said they wanted me to share their stories. I am going to do that, because that is part of my obligation to my constituents. William Webb is one of those veterans in my riding, who served for 20 years before being medically released in 2016.

One challenge for him is that there are few supports for veterans released medically. There is another challenge that is important, and I hope the government hears this, case managers for veterans are always changing because they are on stress leave, and nobody is able

to help the veterans navigate the very limited supports available. This is important.

We need to understand that services are falling apart because the people delivering those services leave because of their own stress. In February, his pension was cut significantly due to the pension transition funding. Mr. Webb has been fighting Veterans Affairs for two years, with a 10% success rate. He has PTSD, he tried to qualify for the disability tax credit, and he keeps getting rejected.

The other reality, which I have heard not only from Mr. Webb but other veterans as well, is that they have service dogs that support them with their post-traumatic stress disorder, and Veterans Affairs does not see service dogs as beneficial to veterans, so there is no financial support. It is important for the House to recognize that service dogs are extremely expensive. Getting service dogs is a great expense to veterans. One of the biggest challenges for William is that he cannot find housing. Now that he has a service dog, trying to find housing is increasingly hard. When is the government going to make sure that veterans receive the housing they need?

Then there is Don Choiniere. Don served the military for a fairly short period, but when he enlisted, he had no health issues. During his service, he came into contact with asbestos, and now has significant health issues because of it. He has been fighting Veterans Affairs since the 1980s with regard to the chemicals with which he came into contact. He wants some compensation for this, because the medical outcome, and what he endured for this country, has had a huge impact on him, and always will. Again, he is facing the challenges of so many veterans, whom have very limited supports, because they were medically released from duty.

Finally, there is Max Gaboriault. Max and I have had numerous conversations, and I have a deep respect for how strongly he is fighting for his rights every day. He was in the military, and went to Afghanistan. During his time in Afghanistan, a lot of people around him were lost, and it was really painful for him.

We have to recognize that when this country asks people to do this, we are asking them to risk their own lives, and watch others pass away in tragic circumstances. When he came home, his family and friends noticed a difference, but he felt sort of peaceful, because daily life was so much easier than what he experienced.

However, that peace turned into violence and aggression, and he still struggles with that. Today, he has PTSD, and has been diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder. Max continues to struggle. He wants his pension reinstated. He is at risk of being homeless by the end of this month, so when and how will his little boys visit him?

These are the realities. The Prime Minister needs to stand up and apologize, because what is happening across this country is not right, and I ask the Prime Minister to do the right thing.

Business of Supply

•(1130)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister was clear and unequivocal in August 2015 when he was in Belleville, with members of his own caucus, who are also veterans, and said that he would immediately restore lifelong pensions to veterans, and that no veteran should ever have to fight their government in court. There was an understanding across the country that the promise for the restoration of lifelong pensions meant that it was the pension prior to the new veterans charter.

When the member talks to veterans, was it their clear and unequivocal understanding that that was what the Prime Minister meant when he made that promise?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, that was what veterans believed to be the promise. This pension that is now the reality is significantly less. It does not include the family, it does not look at the realities that so many of our veterans face.

Again, it goes back to that sacred oath. When we ask people to experience the things they experience, to put their life on the line, whether domestically or internationally, when we ask our military people to do that, when they come home, they need to believe we are going to be there for them, and that this country is going to honour that sacred promise.

The government has not fulfilled that promise. That does not mean it has not done some things right, it just means it has not fulfilled the promise it made.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was here for four years in opposition when there was a very strong mood among the general public that went beyond veterans, where people were looking for more respect going to veterans. When we had the change in the last election two years ago, there have been significant achievements by this government: increasing compensation for pain and suffering; focusing on mental health; creating education benefits; investing more in families and caregivers. There have been literally hundreds of millions more dollars invested by this government.

Will the member, as her colleague did, recognize that there has been a significant effort by the government to date? Yes, there is always room to do better.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I am going to say their names again, Max, William, and Don.

Whenever a decision is made, we have to remember these are the people that put their lives on the line every single day, that made a sacred oath to Canada that they would stand up, and do whatever they were asked to do. That is not coming back to them.

Yesterday, there was a CBC article stating that there had been 14 different studies over the last few years and over 190 recommendations. We have studied this to death. We need to see action now. Our veterans deserve nothing less.

•(1135)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, who is now the critic for a very important issue.

Those veterans outside are not gathered there because they are happy. They are not gathered there because they are being treated fairly. They are gathered there, because the government has failed. The government says, "Let us not make it partisan." It seems to me that a promise was made during an election to increase the amount that veterans were to receive, and to restore those pensions. It seems to me that was pretty partisan.

The Liberals try to baffle us here with numbers. They do not tell us people are receiving less and less. When are the Liberals going to live up to their promises, and look after our veterans?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the passion of the member, and many veterans across Canada are asking the same question. When will we see action, when will we be part of that solution? I hope it is very soon, and I will continue to fight for that.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with mixed emotions, quite frankly, that I rise on this subject today. There is an emotion that is clear and unequivocal.

This is a very simple motion that calls on the Prime Minister of Canada to apologize to veterans for the insensitive comments he made in Edmonton. The motion also calls on the Prime Minister to live up to the promises he made to veterans during the last election. There are veterans on the Hill today protesting not just the policies of the government but the inaction by the government, based on many of the promises it made.

To provide some historical context on this, I travelled across the country in my role as critic for veterans affairs. I was very proud to be in that role from October 2016 to August 2017. I met with lots of veterans. I met with stakeholders and their families. I met with organizations, and visited military bases. The one message I heard loud and clear was the role of Canada to have a sacred obligation with our veterans.

At that time, there was a lot of disappointment brewing because of what the Prime Minister, had said. When he stood up in Belleville in August 2015, and made that now famous campaign promise that he would immediately restore lifelong pensions to veterans and that no veteran should ever have to fight their government in court, he had not been fulfilled that promise at that point.

As I said in my question to the hon. member from the NDP, there was an expectation among veterans of what the Prime Minister promised. It was clear and unequivocal that he would restore lifelong pensions to the manner in which they were before the new veterans charter was introduced. The recent announcement in December falls short of that.

If members do not believe me, they can go among the veterans community and talk to them, find out how they feel about the recent pension announcement, notwithstanding the fact it was made two days before Christmas, at a time when veterans are extremely vulnerable. The minister made the announcement on behalf of the Prime Minister, because he knew it would fall short of what veterans were expecting, and perhaps it would get lost in the Christmas cycle.

Business of Supply

The most telling part of that press conference, when I watched it, was Murray Brewster from the CBC. He asked a question of the Minister of Veterans Affairs that went like this: "Can you guarantee that veterans today, because of this announcement, will receive an equal or greater amount than they would have under the previous pension benefit?" The Minister of Veterans Affairs said, "No, I cannot guarantee that."

Across the country, among the veterans community, one could almost feel the breath coming out of our veterans, because that is not what the Prime Minister promised in Belleville in August 2015. He promised he would immediately restore lifetime pensions to veterans. The understanding within the veterans community was that he was going to return those pensions, and he did not.

Then we get to Edmonton. Just a couple of weeks ago, when the veteran Brock Blaszczyk asked the question of the Prime Minister. The unconscionable response of the Prime Minister was that veterans are expecting more than he can give them right now. What veterans were expecting was exactly what the Prime Minister had promised, a return to lifelong pensions, and that no veteran should have to fight their government in court. One can imagine the response among the veterans community.

What we are doing today is asking the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans across the country for that insensitive comment.

● (1140)

The Prime Minister has no problem apologizing for many other things, in many cases with tears streaming down his face, but the level of disrespect that he showed our veterans is appalling. All we are asking for is that he apologize and that he live up to his promise.

The second part of that promise is the interesting one. He said that no veterans should ever have to fight their government in court. That was in direct relation to the Equitas lawsuit out of Vancouver. I guess the Prime Minister thought that somehow he was going to deal with this case, but the facts do not speak to that.

The previous veterans affairs minister, the hon. member for Durham, had an abeyance agreement with the Equitas lawsuit, and I am sure the member will speak to that. They effectively had an agreement in that lawsuit. That was why it was held in abeyance. Unfortunately, because of the election, the minister of veterans affairs at the time, the hon. member for Durham, ran out of runway and he could not deal with this. That abeyance agreement was to be held in place but it expired in May 2016.

The fact is that the Prime Minister, through the minister of veterans affairs after the election, restarted the Equitas lawsuit. That was broken promise number two to our veterans. Number one is the pension. Number two is that the government is reinstating the court case against the Equitas veterans.

I guess when one is sitting as a member of the third party, as the Prime Minister was when going into the last election, it is easy to shoot for the stars, hoping to hit the moon on a lot of these promises. That is exactly what the Liberals did, and we have seen it with other promises, such as the promise on electoral reform.

The veterans issue has really come to light over the last couple of weeks and that wound to our veterans' community is deep as a result of those broken promises.

The Prime Minister did make many promises to everyone in this country, including our veterans, to try to get elected. The most appalling thing was when he stood in Belleville with veterans behind him as a backdrop, many of them wearing their medals, including members of his own caucus who were veterans at the time, and many of whom presented this platform to the Prime Minister. I can speculate how that conversation went, "If we promise them this, we will get their support." He used them as pawns.

I do not believe that the Prime Minister had any intention of living up to that promise. I believe that he knowingly deceived our veterans in order to gain their support because of some transgressions that had gone on in the past.

As I sit in the House, I find it rich and funny some of the comments that come back on me, some of the things that I have said to veterans as I criss-crossed the country. I acknowledge there were problems in the past between veterans and the previous government. I showed some contrition, as did the former minister of veterans affairs, the member for Durham. This contrition would start the conversation. It would give a sense of respect to veterans that things were not perhaps as great as they should have been under the previous government. However, in every meeting in every town and city across this country that I was in this past summer, the one thing I did not do was lie to veterans. We had open and honest discussions about what failed and what we could do better as a party in order to gain their trust again, a trust, as I said that the former minister of veterans affairs had started to build until he ran out of runway.

In all of the discussions I had, the one thing that veterans told me upset them the most is they feel they have lived through a generation of lies, a generation of deceit. I can say in all honesty that we are all guilty of that. All of us share that responsibility.

● (1145)

Members can imagine the feeling now when a prime minister, or member of Parliament hoping to be the prime minister, stands up and makes all of these promises. The reaction of veterans is, "Here we go again. Another one is standing up and telling us he is going to do something and he doesn't do it." It is shameful.

Of the many meetings and stakeholder groups I met with, they all spoke about the sacred obligation. They all spoke about this military covenant. It goes back to when Sir Robert Borden stood before the troops just before the Battle of Vimy Ridge and gave this now famous quote:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to prove to the returned men its just and due appreciation of the inestimable value of the services rendered to the country and Empire; and that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

Those are powerful words from a former prime minister, Sir Robert Borden, just before the Battle of Vimy Ridge. It is that inestimable value that I think all of us need to consider, and not just now but as we go forward in how we deal with our veterans.

Business of Supply

Again, I have talked with many veterans since that pension announcement, and over the course of the last several years, and the shameful part is that there is a growing perception, real or otherwise, and I say it is real, that there is an inherent amount of value in the government of putting money into pet projects of the Prime Minister. It is abdicating our responsibility at home to our veterans by putting millions and millions into other countries, billions in some cases, for international development efforts. Our veterans, seniors, and many other Canadians are asking, “What about us?”

When someone says to a veteran in Edmonton, “You are asking for more than I can give right now”, do members not think those veterans and seniors are not seeing the amount of money that is flowing out of the government, the debt and deficit situation it is creating with \$500 million going to an infrastructure bank in China that is going to develop infrastructure outside of this country? Do members not think it is right that people are asking these questions? They are being told that they are asking for more than what the government can give, yet the government is giving to its global pet projects, to curry favour with the United Nations. The government is giving to things that are not directly impacting Canadians, that are not directly impacting our veterans.

Members can imagine if the government made a \$100-million announcement to give that money to some country somewhere else. What is wrong with saying that our first priority is to look after our veterans? How are we going to spend that \$100 million here to help our veterans, to help our seniors, to help the marginalized? Let us talk about this as a priority of government. When the Prime Minister says that the veterans are asking for more than the government can give right now, maybe the Prime Minister should stop giving to some of his global pet projects and prioritize our veterans and seniors here in this country. At least, at a minimum, that could help him live up to the promises that he made.

Last night we talked about the sacred obligation. I have been working on a bill since October. Actually, I have been working on it a lot longer than that. I call it the military covenant bill, or the sacred obligation bill. It is one thing that veterans have told me right across the country that they would like to see from the government, this Parliament, and Canadians: a sacred obligation. Last night at a vote, that bill did not pass.

The bill proposed amendments to the Veterans Affairs Act, and talked about the fairness principles, how we treat veterans, how we treat our families, and dealing with things in a timely manner. I would have thought, after the Prime Minister had made those unbelievably insensitive comments to our veterans community, that at a minimum the Liberals would have supported that bill to at least go to committee to deal with some of the questions that were raised throughout the debate on the bill in the House of Commons.

● (1150)

What did the Liberals do? In an unbelievable display of further disrespect to our veterans, every single member of the Liberal caucus stood up and voted against that private member's bill. Every single veteran in the Liberal caucus, every single one of them who wears medals they have earned, stood up and voted against that bill.

I was really surprised, quite frankly, to see the member for South Surrey—White Rock stand up and vote against that bill. This is a

person, a now member of Parliament, who has been the strongest supporter of the *Equitas* group that I have heard of. He has been there with them. He has been to their fundraisers. He understands the issue, and yet, when we talk about this sacred obligation, the member for South Surrey—White Rock stood up, because he was whipped by his government, and did not support a bill that would establish these fairness principles, this military covenant and a sacred obligation into legislation. That is absolutely unconscionable and shameful.

When the government talks about all of these programs and all of these things that it has created, it is multi-layered. There is a lot of confusion within the veterans community. However, one thing veterans are not confused about is that the Prime Minister did not live up to his promise. He did not live up to his promise to restore lifelong pensions.

If that was the case and the veterans were happy about what they have seen and heard, they would not be protesting outside on Parliament Hill today. There would not be a movement, a backlash, across this country on social media.

We can look at the reaction and some of the comments by those who were advocating for the lifelong pension, who actually thought that the Prime Minister meant what he said when he stood up in Belleville, that he was going to return to lifelong pensions.

Sean Bruyca, who is a veteran and veterans advocate, said:

[T]he government merely resurrected ghosts of Christmases past with a hodgepodge of benefits that amount to recycled, remodeled and repackaged programs that already exist.

Here is another:

It's fair to say the disappointment (with the new plan) has been immense because it just didn't do the trick.

If you're going to make a promise to provide lifetime pensions, then do it.

As said in the quote, “Do it.” Unfortunately, the Prime Minister failed to live up to that promise. We are asking again that he apologize to veterans. This has created a lot of animosity across this country. It has created a deep wound within the veterans community. I can speak to that clearly because I have heard from veterans how disappointed and upset they are that they were lied to and that they were disrespected.

To conclude, one of the issues, as I said, that came up across the country as I travelled is the issue of the sacred obligation, this covenant, this agreement between veterans and the government and its people. For the inestimable value of what they provide, the sacrifices and the services that not only our veterans provide but their families provide, we owe them no less, certainly no less than what was promised, certainly no less than an apology for those extremely insensitive remarks that the Prime Minister made.

Business of Supply

I often say this, and I said it the other night as I finished up with a rebuttal for my private member's bill, that it is an incredible privilege to be able to sit in this place. There have been so many people who have sacrificed so much through times of war, families who have been decimated, lives that have been lost, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, blood that has been split. Oftentimes I will go up to the Memorial Chamber and look through the Book of Remembrance. I was there the day that my wife's Uncle Jackie's page was turned. He was killed over Poland as he flew a Lancaster bomber.

I think of those sacrifices that allow us the privilege to sit in our symbol of democracy. The Prime Minister owes those veterans an apology.

• (1155)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are all extremely fortunate to even be in this room. It is the work our men and women in uniform have done throughout the world that has given us the ability to even have this discussion today.

I want to acknowledge the fact that the member is willing to be critical even of the previous government and the work it did on this file. The member was quoted as saying, in October, "The previous government had lost and had become disconnected with the veterans, lost a lot of the trust. It is very fair criticism. I'll accept the criticism." I appreciate the fact that he said that.

In his comments, the member said that things may not have been as great as they could have been. That implies that things were pretty good, but they were not. We had what was called the new veterans charter, which was a living document, which was not touched once by the previous government. We saw offices closed. We saw more and more services being taken away from veterans. The reality of the situation is that right now we are fighting our way back, trying to get back—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do have to allow for other questions. I allowed the member a minute and a half for his intervention. It should only be a minute.

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, one of the issues in restoring relationships and faith, I believe, is to show some contrition, and I did that. I believe that I was following the path of the former minister of veterans affairs, the hon. member for Durham, in that. Understanding and acknowledging that there were issues in the past helps in solving those issues, particularly for our side with respect to our dealings with veterans. However, there is a big difference between that and lying. The one thing I did not do was lie to veterans as I went across the country, and I can say that the member for Durham did not lie to veterans.

The challenge is when one stands up there and makes promises and does not fulfill those promises, as the Prime Minister did. That is why we are here today. It is to tell the Prime Minister to apologize, not just for his disrespectful comments but for the promises he made.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate learning from my hon. colleague from Barrie—Innisfil and other colleagues about some of the issues facing veterans. I want to echo the comments I heard from the member across the way acknowledging the need to rebuild trust. That is very important. We

all acknowledge the issues we are dealing with concerning veterans. It is a broken system, and it did not just happen overnight. There is no point hanging out here figuring out whose fault it is. At the same time, I believe that the Prime Minister needs to offer an apology.

I just wanted to mention that I met with Trevor Sanderson, one of the veterans out front who is advocating for changes. He stressed the need to be nonpartisan on this issue to move forward. He said something to me that really resonated, which is that we need to include the voices of veterans who are accessing services to find out what the gaps are. I am concerned that the Liberals are going to go away and figure out a solution to a problem they do not fully understand and will not include the voices of veterans enough.

• (1200)

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, that is an incredibly important issue to discuss in terms of the veterans-led initiative. This is something I have heard. Who knows better than veterans how to deal with veterans? I certainly respect the work Veterans Affairs Canada does and that the employees do. I believe that they are making their sincerest attempts to do that. However, right across this country, I heard that if they want to fix the issues with veterans, they need to get veterans involved in those issues. That becomes incredibly important in moving forward and solving the issues veterans have.

There have been 14 studies in Veterans Affairs about transitional issues. The DND ombudsman has issued reports. The veterans ombudsman has issued reports, yet we still struggle with issues of transition. If they want to find out how to transition properly, they should talk to veterans who have been through the process and not come up with their own scheme to try to solve this problem. I believe in a veterans-driven, veterans-led initiative to solve many of the issues facing our veterans. I look forward to meeting Trevor and the others at 1:30 when I go out there to see them with my hon. colleague.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's excellent speech. I appreciate his admitting that the former government fell short in many ways. I also would like to elaborate on what the member for Durham was doing.

We have made mention of what our shortcomings were. Now we have a new government and a new Prime Minister, which made some incredible claims. I am wondering if the member could tell us what veterans groups are saying about the current government and the Prime Minister.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, the first issue is to show contrition and admit that there were some issues. I did that. I know the hon. member for Durham did that. However, it is about resolving those issues.

Business of Supply

As I said earlier, the challenge is that a third party, in coming up with campaign promises, can come up with anything. It can basically promise anything it wants. The Prime Minister did that with respect to lifelong pensions and not fighting governments in court. I do not think the Liberals costed it out. That is the problem. The Prime Minister sits there and says that we are asking for more than the government can give right now. Maybe he should have known that prior to making that promise to our veterans. At a minimum, we are asking him to apologize for that promise.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was touched earlier when the parliamentary secretary made reference to her two sons. I think each and every member of this House can relate to the importance of our veterans.

There is no question that the actual level of commitment being delivered is far greater today than it was two years ago. Does the member not recognize the level of commitment seen on all sides of the House and that the tributes given to veterans are, in fact, genuine? The reality is that there is a great deal more money being spent on veterans and for services today than there was in the last number of years.

•(1205)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, what I would admit to is the fact that there are a lot of platitudes and nice sounding words coming from the Prime Minister, with the exception of what he and the veterans affairs minister said in Edmonton.

There is a lot of confusion within the veterans community about what types of programs the government is announcing. There are different things. There are multi-layered things. One affects the other. That confusion creates a lot of doubt within the veterans community. What we are seeing now is confusion, doubt, and veterans not understanding what programs are available to them. I am getting emails from people who are actually getting less money now than they were prior to some of the changes the government implemented.

Confusion creates doubt, but it also creates a problem, because we are dealing with veterans, many of whom are transitioning out because of mental health issues or physical disability issues. As I heard in Calgary, a number of programs, in many cases, are not even known to our veterans. Even when they become known, many do not qualify for them. I would say that there is confusion and doubt. The government can throw all the money it wants at it. However, if it is not working, it is not working.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Davenport.

Thousands of dedicated women and men in the military leave the comfort of civilian life every day to put their skills and talents to good use across Canada and around the world.

These courageous individuals willingly put their lives on the line and are always prepared to go into harm's way. They have dedicated their lives to defending Canada's sovereignty, protecting our values, and promoting international peace and security around the globe.

No one is in a better position to understand the sacrifices and to appreciate the valuable work of our armed forces than the members of the defence staff and those who support them.

The Canadian Armed Forces personnel and Department of National Defence civilian employees work side by side as an integrated team. They know better than anyone how important it is to support the women and men of the armed forces when they are nearing the end of their service.

They saw for themselves how their colleagues transition from military life to civilian life. That is why they resolved to take care of the health and well-being of all military personnel and their families. That is why Canada's defence policy, entitled "Strong, Secure, Engaged", is making tremendous strides when it comes to helping people leaving the military, either on retirement or because of an illness or injury.

The way we take care of the women and men of our armed forces is at the heart of our defence policy and everything it seeks to accomplish.

The Canadian Armed Forces has reworked its transition approach in order to ensure that members receive the professional and personalized support they need as they prepare to return to civilian life after military service.

The defence policy includes four new initiatives to improve transitions both within and outside the forces.

The first initiative consists in re-establishing the personnel administration branch of experts in military human resources. Every CF member will be able to use the services of that group. Among other things, this group will ensure that members preparing for retirement are aware of career transition services such as career counselling or job finding assistance, and that they have access to these services if they so desire.

Furthermore, 200 employees will be added to the Canadian Armed Forces health services. These employees will provide care to ill or injured members. The new staff will include transitional care specialists. Ill or injured members who return to civilian life will receive personalized health care and services until they are able to officially access services from Veterans Affairs Canada.

Under the policy, a Canadian Armed Forces transition group will be established, which will be the third new initiative.

The group will be made up of Canadian Armed Forces members who are experts in military human resources. They will ensure that every member of the Canadian Armed Forces receives personalized support as they transition to civilian life. The Canadian Armed Forces transition group will be commanded by a general officer and will be approximately 1,200 strong.

All military personnel will have access to the group's services. The staff will ensure that all pre-release and pension administration is completed, and that the veterans' benefits are in place before the members transition to care under Veterans Affairs Canada.

Business of Supply

Just as importantly, the Canadian Armed Forces transition group will make sure that retired members are aware of the career transition programs offered by the Defence team and Veterans Affairs Canada and that they are enrolled in these programs if they so choose.

Services, such as vocational rehabilitation, financial literacy, individual career counselling, and job searching, are also offered by third-party service providers.

• (1210)

The National Defence team looks after the interests of both Canadian Armed Forces members and their families, who are the source of much of their strength. The Government of Canada has made it clear that the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces, and Veterans Affairs Canada are going to streamline the transition for Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, and their families.

The fourth initiative in the “Strong, Secure, Engaged” policy is there to make that happen. Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces have established a Seamless Transition Task Force that will implement an improved transition model for retiring Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, and their families.

All Canadians who care about Canadian Armed Forces members can be confident that the many progressive measures the government is taking will give those members access to the care and support they need. Our approach to our members and veterans is one that involves the entire government. In budget 2016, we put more money in the pockets of veterans and their families to increase their financial security. In budget 2017, we supported the health and well-being of veterans and their families by investing in mental health support, educational opportunities, and career transition services, and these new and improved services will be available soon.

All of these programs complement each other: physical and mental health services for veterans and their families to promote well-being; educational support services to help build a new career after service; career transition services to find a rewarding job; family support, including financial assistance if necessary; caregiver recognition; and advice and support services to help veterans integrate into their new community. All of the programs can also be tailored to each veteran's unique needs.

The government listened to the concerns raised by the families of military members and veterans, advocates, and communities about the benefits and programs. We listened to them and created a detailed plan to restore and enhance benefits through plans and services designed to improve the life of veterans and their families. I am very proud of the government's efforts to finally make this a reality.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important for us to talk about the investment that has been made by our government, which is over \$10 billion, and the various areas in which we chose to make those investments. The member was very clear in highlighting many of the areas that were in need, and in many areas our government has made

the commitment to invest. I know those investments happened as a result of immediate consultation we undertook with veterans.

Would the member comment on the importance of consulting, how those consultations led to decisions on where we would make investments, and how veterans are now more fully and well supported by these investments?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

It is a very good question and we did indeed consult veterans, especially those in my riding where there are three branches of the Legion. We met with them and they told us what they wanted. The needs of veterans were addressed in recent budgets.

In particular, as my colleague mentioned, we announced \$10 billion in assistance for veterans over the next few years. Not \$10 million, but \$10 billion. We are also offering more services. We re-opened the nine veterans affairs offices closed by the previous government. We also opened a new one in Surrey. This is an important service. We are also looking after families by enhancing veterans' pensions. In addition, we are providing a non-taxable amount of \$1,000 per month to those who need a caregiver.

These are all measures taken by the government to honour the service of the members of our military who are retiring after offering what is most precious to their community and their country: their life.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I represent the riding of New Westminster—Burnaby, which has had a long tradition of involvement with the Canadian Forces. The Royal Westminster Regiment is located there. Many of the soldiers who are part of the Royal Westminster Regiment served in Afghanistan.

In front of the New Westminster city hall is the cenotaph, and on that cenotaph there are hundreds of names of those who gave their lives for their country, including my grandfather and my uncle. Every Remembrance Day there are literally thousands of people in New Westminster and Burnaby who show up for the Remembrance Day ceremony, because we want to pay tribute to our veterans.

What we have been hearing from the government today is that everything is fine, that there is no problem, that we have done everything we need to do. It is very clear that is not the case. There is much more than can be done. The new veterans charter needs to be improved and revised.

Business of Supply

Many veterans are not getting the services they deserve, and are simply being left aside. The government loves to cite numbers, but the reality is that when we talk about thousands and thousands of veterans, those amounts come down to very small amounts for some veterans. Many veterans, as we know, are outside on the streets of our cities across the country. It is unacceptable in this day and age that we have not learned to provide those investments for veterans.

Does the hon. member not feel the government has fallen short? Does he not feel the Prime Minister should apologize, and the government should get to work in providing services for veterans?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that we can always do better. However, I am very proud of the action that our government has taken. Since we took office, an additional \$10 billion has been allocated to help veterans. We have reopened offices and reinstated lifetime pensions for an amount of up to \$360,000, which could also take the form of a monthly payment of up to \$2,650. That is huge. There is also the caregiver recognition benefit and the education benefit that helps veterans go back to school. I think that we have done a lot, but we can always do even better. That is why our party is in power, to try to make life better for all Canadians.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute pleasure for me to rise to speak to this opposition day motion on behalf of the residents of Davenport, who I am so proud to represent.

A couple of my colleagues asked why I was speaking to this motion since I was from a downtown riding of Toronto. I said I am very proud to have a very active Legion in my riding, the Royal Canadian Legion Earls Court Branch #65. It has a great Legion Hall where there is a lot of fun, mirth, and activity, and where a lot of people in the community come together. It is on Ossington Street near Bloor Street.

Every single year at Prospect Cemetery in my riding, there is a really wonderful Remembrance Day ceremony, where people come from right across Toronto to attend. It is in its 89th year. This year will be its 90th year. At the Cross of Sacrifice, the Royal Canadian Legion Earls Court Branch #65 holds court, and has a very beautiful service to honour all Canadians who fought in past wars and sacrificed their lives for Canada. I am very proud, on behalf of Davenport residents, to be speaking to this opposition day motion.

That said, this government is committed to providing all current forces members and veterans with the support and services they so rightly deserve. The Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF, and Veterans Affairs Canada take the health and well-being of CAF members and veterans very seriously.

On November 4, 2015, our government pledged to ensure that veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve. We delivered the first of our changes with a \$5.6 billion investment in financial security for veterans and their families in budget 2016. On that day, our finance minister said, "Our veterans have dedicated their lives to the defence of their country. They

deserve our gratitude, our respect and our support. We made a solemn promise that they will have it. And we will keep that promise."

That day, we increased the disability award from a maximum of \$310,000 to a maximum of \$360,000; we increased income replacement, from 75% of a veteran's pre-release salary to 90%; we reopened the nine offices closed by the Conservatives; we announced that we would hire staff to make up for the Conservative cuts; and much more. Just to be clear, we reopened offices in Kelowna and Prince George, B.C.; Saskatoon; Brandon, Manitoba; Thunder Bay, Windsor; Sydney, Nova Scotia; Charlottetown; and Corner Brook; as well as opening a brand new office in Surrey, B.C., and expanded outreach services to the north.

A year later, in budget 2017, we announced \$624 million to further improve the health and well-being of veterans and their families, including an all new education benefit; career transition services to help employ those skills unique to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as create a new centre of excellence in post-traumatic stress disorder.

This year, we are delivering on the promise that we made to restore the pension for life option, as well as to continue to improved service delivery, and enhance programs that will benefit veterans with service-related injuries and illnesses. That is what I want to talk a little more about.

Since we were elected just over two years ago, we have listened to veterans, their families, and advocates to better understand their reality. We have heard them, and in response, we have invested over \$6 billion to improve benefits and services for veterans and their families over the last two years.

With an emphasis on overall well-being, the new pension for life invests another \$3.6 billion in benefits that can be tailored to meet the individual needs of veterans and their families. We know that every veteran is different. However, one unifying experience is the major life change that results from the transition to life after service. The most successful transitions occur when a veteran has a positive state of well-being: a balance of financial, mental, physical, and social factors.

Business of Supply

While most veterans transition smoothly, some struggle for various reasons, and of the approximately 1,500 members who are released each year due to illness or injury, almost 20% suffer with a mental health condition. It is paramount that those veterans and their families know what programs and services are available to them. That is why the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, and the Chief of the Defence Staff together launched the joint suicide prevention strategy on October 5, 2017.

● (1225)

I believe that every member of the House appreciates what a tragedy it is if any member of the Canadian Armed Forces or one of Canada's veterans suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder or any other mental health condition that impacts their health and well-being. We know that when a member or a veteran is affected, their families are affected too.

The CAF and VAC are committed to a coordinated, collaborative approach and identified over 160 initiatives dedicated to saving the lives of veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members. One suicide is too many. While this strategy supports the government-wide healthy Canadians priority and fulfills another of the Prime Minister's mandate items for Veterans Affairs Canada, more importantly, it is about these two departments working together to help military men and women and veterans reduce their risk, build resiliency, and prevent suicide to the fullest extent possible.

This joint approach will improve CAF members' and veterans' well-being and support them by reducing stigma and encouraging them to seek the help they need. A key resource is Veterans Affairs Canada's nationwide network of over 4,000 mental health professionals. They are ready to deliver services to veterans and members of the Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP who have post-traumatic stress disorder and other operational stress injuries. Veterans and their families can also find mental health information support and resources from 11 operational stress injury clinics across the country, plus satellite service points from coast to coast to coast. They also offer telehealth services for those in remote areas.

Each clinic has a multidisciplinary team of specialists who have been professionally trained to address the unique needs of veterans. They are equipped to refer serving Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP members, veterans, and their families to mental health professionals who provide individualized assessment and treatment. These programs and services are complemented by an additional seven operational trauma and stress support centres operated by the Canadian Armed Forces.

Earlier in my speech, I mentioned the centre of excellence in post-traumatic stress disorder that was created by our government. This is of personal importance to me, because I also have veterans in my riding who have served in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and various other places, and PTSD is impacting them. They were okay for a while post-release, but then it hit them, the anxiety, the lack of sleep, the nightmares, the depression. It took them a while to actually ask for help.

I am so proud that we have created this centre of excellence in post-traumatic stress disorder. The centre is a place where we can access the best in research, the best tools, and the best support for our veterans. We can also work to try to find ways to prevent PTSD

moving forward, and we can do all we can to share our best practices with others around the world.

Veterans Affairs Canada is clear in its mission to improve the well-being of veterans and their families. This is at the core of everything it does in providing the treatment, support, and services veterans and their families need when they leave our country's service to successfully transition back to our neighbourhoods.

I also want to mention that I am very pleased with our recent announcement of the pension for life. This was something that came up when I was knocking on people's doors during the election in 2015. I know that residents in Davenport will be very pleased that we are fulfilling this promise. They continue to ask that we continue to serve our veterans and help support them on an ongoing basis. I know that they are very pleased with everything we have done to date.

We are deeply committed to supporting our veterans. We fulfill our sacred obligation to them by ensuring that, should they come back injured, we will be there with the benefits and services they need to feel well enough to participate fully in post-military life. Of course, more needs to be done: more services, less complications, more help with getting jobs, and the list goes on. However, we have made a tremendous degree of progress with a \$10 billion investment.

This government is going to continue to make things better for all veterans and their families. More than words, and more than 10 years of inaction, we have demonstrated real action behind our commitments and there is more to come.

● (1230)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly have to say that the veterans in my riding are not feeling very thankful. Too many of them are coming to the doors of my office right now to talk about the deep sense of betrayal, and one sense of betrayal is about the promise of pensions.

What I heard in the member's speech was that veterans are very happy because pensions have been reinstated. Does she not understand that the reinstatement of these pensions has been at such a dramatically reduced rate that we are now seeing seniors coming in devastated because they are getting less money than they used to get and their families are not being included?

One veteran in my riding whose name is Max is going to be homeless at the end of the month because his family cannot deal with the realities of his post-traumatic stress. He will not have a home where his two boys can visit him. He is not happy. He is devastated. I really hope that the government and the member will support this motion and ask the Prime Minister to apologize for this very broken promise.

Business of Supply

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for sharing that story of a member of her constituency. We have made a tremendous amount of progress. We have made a very definitive commitment. We are spending \$10 billion more to better support our veterans. We have increased compensation for pain and suffering. We have increased income replacement for veterans on vocational or psychosocial rehabilitation. We have a focus on mental health. We have reintroduced the pension for life.

We have reopened the offices, as I mentioned in my speech. We have done a lot over the last two years. Does more need to be done? Absolutely, and we will continue to search for ways to do better, but we know we have come a long way. We know that we have more supports in place right now and I know that we are going to continue to do all we can to find more ways to support our veterans moving forward.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought the parliamentary secretary did an exceptional job in terms of her presentation and that truly caring attitude that prevails not only on this side of the House but on both sides, as we all care about our vets.

If we go to what we have accomplished in the last couple of years, hundreds of millions of additional dollars are being brought forward, issues such as mental health, additional funding for injured vets coming back. There is a genuine commitment by this government to improve and re-establish that positive relationship and trust with our vets.

Would the member agree that this is a positive step forward, yet there is still room for us to do better?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, we have made tremendous amounts of improvement and the member is right. When our veterans are ready for post-release, we try to do everything we can to provide them with the supports they need.

I mentioned that we had put a lot of money into ensuring that there are new staff hired so that we can reduce the veteran-to-case manager ratio, which means they get more personalized care, more personalized attention, and more individualized care not only for themselves but their families.

Again, we have done a lot. I am very proud of our government's achievements over the last two years. We have put a significant amount of money into supporting our veterans. I know everyone in the House cares about our veterans. I know that we will, on an ongoing basis, continue to make veterans and supporting them and their families a priority for us. I look forward to the work ahead.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an important debate brought by my colleague today, because it highlights one of our most important duties as parliamentarians. As I have said in debates in this place, before Canada sends our men and women into harm's way, whether it is fighting ISIS or in other deployments, decisions related to the Canadian Armed Forces, those Canadians who serve us, are perhaps the most important decisions, debates, and questions we have as parliamentarians.

We should be very deliberative and thoughtful in our decisions with respect to deploying our military. We need to apply that same

deliberate, compassionate, and honest approach in how we treat those men and women who come back with a variety of service injuries.

Unfortunately, in the last decade-plus, there has been a lot of rhetoric with respect to veterans' issues and veterans' care, but very little deliberate language trying to explain and understand how we best provide for our men and women. They are often used as political tools and I want to see that end, so I am going to devote most of the time I have for my remarks today to setting the record straight. Even some of the language I see from the minister's office shows he does not understand how programs and services are delivered to the people he serves, the same with people in his office. I hope they are tuning in.

I am also going to try to take a balanced look at the new veterans charter, and why, as minister, I tried to improve it, fix the problems, fill in the gaps, as opposed to making irresponsible promises that the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party, in the last campaign, either did not understand, did not cost, or did not care whether they fulfilled them. I certainly hope it is not the last one of those reasons. I certainly hope not. I think, at a bare minimum, all politicians, when talking about care for those who serve us, have to have honesty and respect underlying all of our comments, all of our promises, and all of our commitments.

We hear a lot about quotes from our past with respect to our obligation. I have often talked about the Royal Canadian Legion, and once a Liberal member mocked me for suggesting the Legion has a role, but the Legion has been serving veterans far longer than Veterans Affairs Canada. In fact, they were given a mandate to help veterans and help commemoration through an act of Parliament in this place in 1926. They still, in many ways, are at the forefront in their 1,400 locations across the country, where each branch has a veterans' service officer.

I want to start my remarks by saying, veterans started taking care of veterans first, and they still do. I spoke with many of them on the Hill today, because they are trying to take care of their comrades and in some cases, themselves. As I said, we owe them honesty and respect. That is why we are having this debate today. The Prime Minister has not provided honesty or respect in all of his commitments with respect to veteran pensions and veteran care.

We saw that first-hand two weeks ago in Edmonton, where an injured veteran asked him about his commitments, and the Prime Minister told that veteran that he was, in many ways, asking for more than the government could give. However, he was only asking for the Prime Minister to live up to his promise.

Let us talk about this pension for life charade from Christmastime. Even in the minister's own remarks, he suggests building upon programs in place. That was one of his responses. Many of the programs put in place where put in place by ministers of the Paul Martin government, when they started the new veterans charter. Then under the Harper government, we modified and enhanced benefits, including in my time.

●(1235)

When I introduced Bill C-58 in the last Parliament, which outlined a number of new enhancements, new benefits for veterans after direct consultation with veterans, I embedded into that legislation language with respect to the just and appreciation and the obligation we had to our veterans. This comes from a 1917 quote from Sir Robert Borden given to our men overseas who were injured in and around the campaigns of 1917.

Yesterday, Liberal members voted down a private member's bill put forward by my colleague from Barrie to enshrine that sacred obligation, that enhanced social covenant, that we owe to our citizens who we ask to serve with the risk of unlimited liability. That is why our veterans are in court. That is why they are asking for such a covenant. Their comrades in the United Kingdom have it. I is talked about it in Bill C-58.

One of the members from British Columbia brought forward an opposition day motion on it in the last Parliament. I am quite sure the Prime Minister voted for it then as third party leader. He whipped his members to vote against it yesterday, even though I know a lot of those members deeply care, including some who are in the House now. I wish their voices would be heard in their caucus, because right now veterans do not feel they are getting honesty and respect from the Liberal government.

We often quote Sir Robert Borden, who happens to have been my favourite prime minister because of his leadership during the Great War and the toll it took on him.

Here is a quote from a veteran who died 100 years ago, Talbot Papineau. Ironically the Prime Minister is also the member of Parliament for Papineau, but he is referred to as Prime Minister because he leads the government. Everyone in the House has a right to speak as members of Parliament.

The Papineau family, going back to Talbot Papineau's grandfather, has been so important for Quebec life that the Prime Minister now represents a riding named after the Papineau family. The Prime Minister also played Talbot Papineau, the Great War soldier, on television, so there is a direct connection there.

What did Talbot Papineau say to his troops days before he died in the Battle of Passchendaele? He said, "For those who have been disabled, who cannot carry on the good fight — it is certainly for us to see that they want for nothing." He died on the day his regiment lost six of its junior officers on one of the worst days of fighting in Passchendaele. We honour Passchendaele. I know the parliamentary secretary was in Passchendaele.

The Prime Minister needs to do more than just act in the form of Talbot Papineau. He needs to live up to those words. This debate is about that. The fact that he whipped his members to vote against this concept yesterday is troubling.

Business of Supply

We do owe a special, a sacred, a profound obligation to those who are injured while serving us. That is why the Conservative Party has brought this opposition day forward today. Veterans heard the Prime Minister of Canada, in my view, disrespect a veteran with his response in Edmonton because that veteran was asking the Prime Minister to live up to his promises.

Where did the Liberal government go wrong with veterans in its first two years? It boils down to two central pledges in the Liberal campaign. I was still veterans affairs minister during the campaign. During the 2015 campaign, unions were paying people to protest in front of my office. I was still trying to help veterans in need.

I remember very well when the Prime Minister, then third party leader, leader of the Liberal Party, had a rally not far from CFB Trenton in Belleville. The party flew in its star veteran candidates. The Minister of National Defence was there. The parliamentary secretary for U.S. relations was there. The parliamentary secretary for transport was there, all wearing medals, all behind the Prime Minister. It was very impressive form, very impressive people individually..

●(1240)

The Prime Minister said two things in those remarks that day. He said that he would never allow a circumstance where the Government of Canada forced veterans into court to be heard in their fight for benefits. He also made a commitment that day to return to the Pension Act, not make up a modified pension for life, which even the minister admits only 10% or so of people will see any enhancement whatsoever. He made a commitment to return to what veterans know as the old system, the Pension Act, where everyone got a pension for life.

I never made that promise as minister because the old act had inherent problems with it. Many people forgot that. My old friend, Peter Stoffer, the long-time critic for the NDP, agreed with me that the old system had problems and we had to fix the new system, the new veterans charter, because it was based on overall wellness of the veterans and their families. Honesty is not making a promise one will likely not keep.

Then there was the court decision. I have not told the House this before, but I will inform members of it today. I think the people involved with Equitas would be okay with my talking about this level of disclosure.

Business of Supply

The previous Government of Canada, and I was minister at the time, and the Equitas veterans, who were in court because of their frustration, built a level of trust. As a veteran myself and with veterans on my team, I hired a new lawyer. I replaced the Department of Justice lawyer who had brought an argument suggesting in a pretrial motion that the Government of Canada owed no special duty to our veterans. I found that repugnant as a lawyer, as a parliamentarian, and as a veteran. We learned from the Equitas veterans. The family caregiver benefit, the retirement income security benefit, all the benefits the Liberals are now renaming and trying to claim as their own, a lot of them came from advice I received, and we virtually had Equitas settled. Why was it not settled? Because the Liberals dangled the promise of a return to the old Pension Act.

I said that if that was indeed the promise, I could not meet it. I asked whether we could turn our settlement into an abeyance agreement, or at least call time out on the litigation. I told the veterans that if they trusted the Liberals and wanted to go with that deal, as their friend now and not just as minister, I would respect that. I had told Prime Minister Harper at the time that we were close to settling Equitas. I looked at it as a failing of mine. Why did it fail? Because a promise was made, a deception was sown, and the Liberals need to take accountability for it.

I would much rather the Minister of Veterans Affairs admit that the Liberals have broken their promise than to dress it up in a press conference a few days before Christmas. It was shameful. They should step up and say they cannot meet their promise.

The Prime Minister in his town hall in Edmonton basically admitted the government could not afford it. Why did he promise it? We are looking at a return to the old system, a cost to the federal government of somewhere between \$20 billion and \$35 billion. That is because the old system wanted veterans to just quickly go on a pension. It was not about wellness. It was not about transition. If veterans had an operational stress injuries under the old system and because with mental health injuries they could have good times and bad times and they could respond to treatment, they did not get a permanent disability of 100% a lot of the time. If they were assessed at a 40% disability, they had a pension for life that committed them to poverty, or addiction, or family break-up or homelessness.

• (1245)

That is why the old system does not work. We need to focus on the wellness. For those who cannot transition, because of physical or mental injuries, give them lifetime financial support. I did that as minister, with the retirement income security benefit, with the critical injury benefit, with enhancements to PIA, all the things the Liberals are building on now, to ensure the moderate to severely injured, who could not transition, were supported for life. All Canadians want to see that.

Here is what is wrong with the Liberal system. The Liberals throw this number around, which I know they do not even understand. They said they spent \$10 billion on veterans. That is not true. Some of that is accrual accounting, and they are not even forthright on it. It is not a cash accounting spend. It is an accrual. It is a commitment of the federal government to maintain a lifelong benefit. I would like them to break that \$10 billion down into how much is in accrual

accounting and how much is cash out the door. We will know in a couple of years when lapses in public accounts come in. The reckoning is coming. Why can they not just be forthright?

Here is what was not smart about the government's first act. The retroactive top-up of the disability award was very bad public policy. Every dollar I had from the treasury, working with Prime Minister Harper at the time, I wanted to go to the moderately to severely injured and their families, those who were struggling. The vast majority of the \$2 billion or so the Liberals spent retroactively topping up the lump sum went to people with disability assessments in the 13% range. They spent at least a billion dollars on hearing loss. If they were more forthright, I would know exactly how much. Those funds should have put toward families.

Expand the permanent impairment allowance and give family caregiver benefits to everyone on PIA. That is where I was going. That would be sound policy because those are the people who have had trouble transitioning. Those are the people Talbot Papineau, 100 years ago, said, "it is certainly for us to see that they want for nothing."

I know veterans with lower level injuries, such as musculoskeletal and hearing. Some of them go on to work on Bay Street, or in government, or are deputy ministers. Do they need the transitional support? Generally, not. Therefore, any funds should go to the ones who need it.

To say I am profoundly disappointed to be having to debate this here today is an understatement. As I stated at the outset, the two things that veterans deserve are honesty and respect. They did not get that.

If the Prime Minister wants to show those things, he should admit he did not understand the cost of his pension promise, instead of suggesting the veteran in Edmonton was asking for too much. The Prime Minister did not know what he promised. That is shameful. He should admit that.

Business of Supply

The other thing he should do is meet with the Equitas veterans. They are wonderful people. They have served us. I know a lot of the Liberal MPs have met them and like them. Why is he forcing them to go to the Supreme Court of Canada? I agreed with his promise. Veterans should not have to face off against their government in court. He is making them do that. The lawyers from the Justice Department, who I removed from the case, he reappointed. They went back to their old argument that we had stopped them from making.

This is about owning leadership. Leadership is not just photographs, or as the Prime Minister suggested to the Ethics Commissioner, he is like a networker-in-chief for Canada. He owes it to the veterans of our country to tell them why he has broken his promises on a return to a pension for all injured, and for returning Equitas veterans to court. Until I see responsibility from the Prime Minister and the minister, the Conservatives will continue to fight in this place for those who serve us.

• (1250)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his service. He is a veteran himself and should be commended for everything that he has given to this country so that we can have everything that we do have.

I recognize that he was the minister responsible for this file toward the end of the 10 years of the Conservative government's mandate. The truth of the matter is that we lost so much for our veterans during that 10-year period. Some 25% of the staff was eliminated. The new veterans charter that he referenced was supposed to be a living document, yet it was virtually untouched for 10 years. Right now we are in the process of clawing our way back, trying to restore to veterans what they deserve.

While the member had seen everything that happened in the nine years and three months under the Conservative government leading up to his time as being the minister, he did not make any significant steps during the nine months that he had to make real progress, which is what we are seeing right now, despite our having a debate over the amount of what is being done. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

• (1255)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I joined the Canadian Armed Forces and learned leadership skills in the hon. member's riding at the Royal Military College. I am proud to say on flag day that our flag was based on the RMC flag. The member knows that, but he certainly does not know what happened in the last Parliament.

In less than a year, with Bill C-58, which I referenced in my remarks, we brought in the retirement income security benefit, the critical injury benefit, the family caregiver benefit, and expanded the permanent impairment allowance. When the minister referred to building upon existing programs, those are the existing programs.

Spreading out the lump sum or the disability award for life already happened with a predecessor. It was a living document. We saw that Paul Martin's new veterans charter, which all parliamentarians agreed with, was not working to its intended purpose. The only parliamentarian who spoke on the new veterans charter was Roméo Dallaire, a good friend of mine. The iconic Liberal senator and veteran was the only parliamentarian to speak to the bill. It was

rushed through because its focus on wellness was considered by parliamentarians to be better than the old system.

People look longingly at the old system now, but it failed so many people. Let us get it right. Let us build on the programs I started. The minister has put more money into them, but he certainly has not lived up to what the Prime Minister promised.

The member comes from a political family and he is pretty smart. An indication of a broken promise is a press conference a few hours before Christmas. Nothing shows the Liberals' inability to defend their broken promise than trying to hide it on Christmas Eve.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the former minister for his clarity in regard to the truth about what is being spent.

Perhaps the member could comment on the fact that the Prime Minister went to a constituency and told veterans that there just was not enough money available for them. However, there is lots of money for a skating rink which cost \$7 million. There is lots of money for tax havens so that the wealthy do not have to pay their fair share. CEO stock options still are costing this country millions of dollars in revenue. However, there is no money for veterans.

Can the hon. member square that circle for me?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member for London—Fanshawe knows the file well. The historic Royal Canadian Regiment and its museum are in London, and I hear from my friends that she has a lot of interactions with veterans.

The member is absolutely right. This is about leadership or the absence thereof. The Prime Minister of Canada and his cabinet make choices. It was a choice in the first 100 days of his government to spend billions of dollars on a variety of programs, much of them outside our country. It was his choice to settle with Omar Khadr for \$10 billion. It is his choice what goes into the budget and what does not. It was his choice not to keep his promise to veterans.

Business of Supply

The question I asked in a funny little debate we had a few weeks ago was whether the Prime Minister knew the cost of a return to the pension. The vast majority of the injured who leave the Canadian Armed Forces have sustained low injuries to their knees and backs. Combat arms NCMs or officers leave injured, beaten up, but not all of them will need transitional help. To return to the pension, with people living to 100, and the \$30 billion was for low injuries generally, its lump sum top-up was bad policy, because the Liberals spent over \$1 billion for people suffering from hearing loss who might be lawyers on Bay Street. The smarter thing is for the retirement income security benefit to go to the people who need it, the moderate to severely injured.

With respect to the enhancements to the permanent impairment allowance, I wanted to see the family caregiver benefit go to all PIA recipients. Those are the people that Talbot Papineau alluded to. They should not want if their future has been harmed serving our country.

● (1300)

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing speeches about the motion since the beginning of today's sitting. My riding of Jonquière is home to the Bagotville military air base, and I have had the opportunity to participate in a number of activities and talk to soldiers and veterans there. I have also had a chance to participate in activities and talk with people at Branch 209 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Arvida, a very active branch.

The government keeps bragging about the improvements that it has made. It is good that the government reopened the service offices that the Conservatives closed. That did a lot of damage, particularly in my riding and in Saguenay. The government is saying that the lifetime pension is a good thing, but this measure will not be as positive as it should be because it will create a two-tier pension system. That will have a direct impact on individuals and families. When people are no longer able to work, it affects their daily lives.

My colleague mentioned this, but I would like him to elaborate on the negative impact that this approach will have and how it will lower lifetime pension amounts.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Jonquière for her question.

When I was minister of Veterans Affairs, I announced new benefits at the Valcartier military base because there are lots of veterans in Quebec.

[English]

We should be very proud of the men and women from Quebec who serve, and continue to serve. I went to Valcartier because throughout Afghanistan, the members of that base and their families paid a very heavy toll. Bagotville is another very busy base. Some of my colleagues from Quebec served in reserve regiments. We have a very proud history going back to Talbot Papineau, as I referenced in my remarks.

I will say something about the offices, because this is often widely misunderstood. Do we use offices that were opened after the war when there was no health care in Canada and the Government of

Canada had no presence across the country? Those offices were helping pay doctors, who at that time were private practitioners. Today, many of those offices are not being used. We have Service Canada, where in those cities we had a dedicated desk to handle the five or six people who might come in every few days. It was literally that low. As a veteran, what I wanted to see happen in the towns and cities across the country if we were opening an office was that it needed to be for mental health. The Chrétien government opened the first operational stress injury clinic in the early 2000s. We more than doubled the number of operational stress clinics to help deliver services to veterans, not just administration.

● (1305)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I will be splitting my time with the member for Saint-Laurent.

Two years ago, this government made a pledge to Canadians to do more to support veterans and their families. We promised to ensure that veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve and have earned through their dedication, sacrifice, and service to this country. I stood behind the Prime Minister in Belleville and I stand behind him now as we bring forward \$10 billion in programs and services for veterans and their families. We set out to make tangible improvements in the lives of our veterans. In the past two years, this government has come a long way in making a real difference in the lives of veterans and those who care for and love them.

We inherited a department broken from years of neglect and band-aid, boutique, quick fix, photo-op solutions left by the previous government. We need long-term, sustainable solutions. That is what our government is about and that is what takes time to get right. This was a journey that began by listening to veterans, hearing their concerns, and developing a plan to respond to them.

Not only did this government reopen nine of the Veterans Affairs offices that the hon. member for Durham thought were not important, but we actually opened a new one. The Surrey office opened its doors in May 2017. This new Surrey office serves approximately 7,500 veterans, and enables approximately 206 veterans to work in person with their case managers.

Veterans Affairs Canada also reversed the cutbacks in service and hiring. The Conservatives cut over 900 jobs in Veterans Affairs Canada. We have hired 460 more staff in the last two years to deliver services and benefits, answer questions, and help veterans and their families. That number includes more than 180 case managers who work directly with veterans to deliver the services and benefits they are eligible for. We have also increased and improved outreach in every part of the country. In 2017 alone, Veterans Affairs made 12 visits to communities in Canada's north.

Business of Supply

This government also increased the maximum value of the disability award for Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans with service-related illnesses and injuries to \$360,000, putting more money directly into their pockets. Now, 67,000 veterans are better off. We increased the earnings loss benefit, raising it to 90% of an injured Canadian Armed Forces member's military salary at the time of release from the forces.

I mentioned that the first thing this government did was to listen to and hear veterans' concerns. One message we heard loud and clear was that many of the benefits and services delivered through Veterans Affairs were difficult to access and time-consuming to apply for. They also said that they were often not able to apply for the benefits and services they were eligible for because they did not have the information they needed to even ask the right questions. They also told us that we needed to look after those who were most severely injured first, and that is what we have done.

The department began an 18-month review of the way it delivers services and benefits. That review led to 91 recommended actions to improve service delivery. By the end of 2017, the department had put 37 into action and will complete another 45 by the end of the 2018-19 fiscal year. Most of the remaining nine are beyond the department's direct control and it is working with other organizations to make progress on them today. More benefits and supports will be coming into effect on April 1, which will have even greater impact on the lives of veterans and their families.

Here is an example. Under the former Pension Act, let us say a supply technician with 12 years of service ended up with a 40% disability. Under the Pension Act, that soldier could expect a monthly cheque of just over \$1,000, or \$12,000 a year.

• (1310)

Under the new veterans charter, that same veteran would get a lump sum of about \$124,000, and if the severity of their injuries meant they could not return to work, they would get a career impact allowance in the range of \$1,000 a month on top of the \$124,000 lump sum. On top of that there are numerous benefits when it comes to rehabilitation, retraining, education, treatment, and care. All of that adds up to a good way to get people launched into a new and rewarding future.

This was a plan that was supposed to evolve with veterans' needs. This was the design of the new veterans charter, but under the previous government, the Conservatives never let it. They were not interested in having that new veterans charter evolve to where it should be.

A critical promise that we have also delivered is re-establishing a monthly option for veterans. Coming into effect April 1, 2019, this pension for life is a combination of benefits and it will provide income support and stability to veterans who experience a service-related illness or injury. Under this change, that retired technician would receive nearly \$5,000 a month for the rest of his or her life, that is \$60,000 a year for life, and now at 90% of their pre-release salary.

Should they wish to go back to school, they are also entitled to an additional \$80,000 to help cover the cost of tuition and then they will

have access to career transition services to help find meaningful work and a purposeful life.

When the new legislation comes into force it will represent an investment of nearly \$3.6 billion in supporting veterans in addition to the nearly \$6 billion this government committed in the two previous budgets. This means that within two years of a majority mandate, this government has put \$10 billion into the hands of veterans. We have increased spending at the Department of Veterans Affairs from \$3.6 billion a year to this year where it will be \$4.9 billion. That is a huge and substantive improvement.

In the same period in the first two years of the Conservative mandate after 2011, they did nothing. It changed somewhere around 5% and we changed it 30%. We will continue to engage with veterans, families, advocates, groups, and stakeholders. We will continue to listen to hear their concerns and advice. We will continue to make concrete improvements in the programs and services and in the well-being of veterans and their families.

We have come far in this journey, but we are not stopping now. We will continue to move forward on that journey and we will honour and commemorate our veterans' achievements, courage, and sacrifice. We will continue to treat veterans with compassion and respect, giving them the financial and service support they need, not empty platitudes and political gamesmanship. We will always remain committed to the well-being of veterans and their families.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the motion moved by our colleague.

What really gets me here is that the motion has nothing to do with the Liberals' self-congratulatory blather about what they did or did not do. The motion reads as follows:

That the House call on the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans for his insensitive comments at a recent town hall in Edmonton...

What members on this side want is for the Prime Minister to admit he made a mistake. Making mistakes is human. I think veterans would be happy with that. The Conservatives did not make this story up. It was all over the web. That is what the Prime Minister said at town halls. He is the one who made that promise to veterans, not us. What we want to hear today is one simple phrase: "I am sorry I disrespected you."

The Liberals are always tooting their own horn. I get the impression that the word "respect" bothers them. All we are asking for is one simple sentence. Our veterans went out there and fought, and now they are back home and they have rights. They want an apology, and we will keep pressing for that until we hear the words "apologize" and "respect".

Business of Supply

•(1315)

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, we made a lot of promises to veterans, and we are going to keep them.

I understand that they want things to move faster. They want to get things done. I want to get things done. I want to achieve these promises that we made. Sometimes that leads to frustration. We cannot go back, as I mentioned before, to these boutique, quick fixes. It did not help. What we need is a long-term, sustainable, comprehensive plan in order to help veterans over the long term. That is exactly what we are working on.

Is it going to happen overnight? No, it is not. That kind of significant change takes time. We understand the frustration of the veterans who want things to move along faster. We are doing our best. They are going to be happy with the end product.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stood earlier in the House and did my speech and I talked about three constituents we are working with right now. I am just going to say one name again, William Webb.

William Webb served this country for 20 years. Now he is faced with multiple challenges because of caseworkers continuously getting burned out. Whenever he calls, he is again put with somebody else and he has to re-traumatize himself, telling his story. He is just not getting the support he needs. I want to say, with his post-traumatic stress disorder, one of the biggest supports to him is his service dog. That is not under any of this. That means he had to figure out how to get that himself.

How can we do better for our veterans? I hope this member can answer that question.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we have hired back 460 people, 180 of them are caseworkers. That is not enough. Unfortunately, because the caseload has grown over the years, we are having a hard time keeping up with the change, the churn within the department. We are making changes in the department in order to lessen that.

In terms of the service dog issue, I think the member will find that we have made huge progress. We should be hearing about the efficacy study that was funded. That should come out, I would imagine, in the next couple of months. We are going to be poised to address this issue in the future. It will require some extra work and a different way of thinking about benefits and services, but personally, I believe it is the right way forward for a lot of veterans. This will make a difference in their lives. We have made progress, but there is still more progress to make.

[Translation]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the progress and efforts our government has made to support our veterans to this point.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I can assure this House that our Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs are very engaged in the issues that affect our

veterans and have made their well-being and reintegration into civilian life a priority.

•(1320)

[English]

We made a commitment to make it easier for the men and women who have served in uniform so courageously to access their benefits. We are talking about members of our society who have given up so much for our country. They deserve benefits that meet their needs.

In 2015, we pledged to make it easier for veterans to access services, to do more to support their families, to streamline benefits, to reduce the administrative overhead, to improve the veterans' experience with Veterans Affairs Canada, and to help them make a more successful transition to civilian life after service. We have been delivering on those promises, and I will share some examples.

For years, veterans, veterans' advocates, and other stakeholders have told successive governments that there are problems with some of the benefits and services offered by Veterans Affairs as well as with the delivery of those services. Starting in 2016, the Minister of Veterans Affairs began reaching out to the veteran community to ask for their input. He, his predecessor, and the parliamentary secretary have travelled from one end of the country to the other to listen to veterans across the nation.

[Translation]

At the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, veterans and their advocates and stakeholders repeatedly told us that information was often difficult to understand. Eligibility rules were confusing. Veterans had a hard time navigating the process of applying for and receiving benefits and services. Often, they missed out on programs or benefits they were eligible for because they did not have enough information to ask the questions they needed to, in order to find out more about those programs.

[English]

As one veteran put it, "I don't know what I don't know". This lack of knowledge is a real barrier for the Canadian Armed Forces member who is trying to make a successful transition out of the military to a new life after service, often in a new community, and often with very different needs and career goals. We listened to veterans' concerns. We heard them and we acted on them.

[Translation]

Veterans Affairs Canada commenced an 18-month, top-to-bottom review of the way it delivers services to veterans. Department officials also consulted with front-line staff about the strengths and the challenges of the department and its programs.

Business of Supply

The report that came out of that review made 31 recommendations, with 91 actions to improve service delivery. The measures were focused on aligning policies, programs, and functions to support excellence in delivering services. The measures were also aimed at investing in tools, technology, and training to empower Veterans Affairs employees to deliver more effective services to veterans and their families, as well as strengthening communications, information sharing, and outreach. They were also aimed at developing a new model for delivering services to veterans, one that is simpler, more integrated and user friendly.

[English]

The department has now adopted a veteran-centric approach that puts the individual veteran at the core of every decision. They work diligently to ensure a higher standard of care and service, and to uphold the “one veteran, one standard” approach, which is to say that each veteran is treated as an individual with the same standard of respect, support, and care.

[Translation]

By the end of 2017, Veterans Affairs Canada had completed 37 of the actions recommended in the service delivery review. It will complete an additional 45 by the end of the 2018-19 fiscal year, and is working with other organizations to put the remaining nine into action.

There is one goal, one single purpose driving these changes: making real improvements in the well-being of veterans, and for their families, too.

[English]

This is in addition to the commitments we made to veterans from the outset of this government.

Veterans were disillusioned by 10 years of neglect under the previous Conservative government. That is why our government invested over \$10 billion into increasing compensation for pain and suffering; increasing income replacement for veterans on vocational or psycho-social rehabilitation, or veterans who cannot return to work; restoring access to critical services like reopening the nine offices closed by the Conservatives; and hiring 460 staff, focusing on mental health, creating an education benefit, and investing more into families and caregivers. Veterans asked for changes, they asked for action, and we acted.

Just months ago, the Minister of Veterans Affairs announced the details of a pension for life option, a plan designed to help veterans live a full and productive life post-service. This new pension for life option is a monthly tax-free payment for life to recognize pain and suffering. It provides income replacement payable at 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary, indexed annually, and for life for those who need it.

• (1325)

[Translation]

The Pension Act was no panacea, which is why every party in this place supported changes to a model that includes wellness.

Our pension for life gives back the option of a monthly pension that could be double or triple or more than the amount of the lump

sum payment to provide financial security for veterans and their families while guaranteeing the important wellness benefits like rehabilitation, education or career training benefits.

[English]

Take a 30-year-old veteran with 12 years of service who is 60% disabled. He or she would be able to receive \$4,660 per month across his or her lifetime in pain and suffering compensation and income replacement, plus \$1,000-a-month to his or her caregiver for supports. The veteran could access up to \$80,000 for post-secondary education. There is no longer a time limit on applying for rehabilitation services or vocational assistance. Pension for life works with veterans, providing them with financial, educational, and mental supports they need to seamlessly transition to their new life post-service.

[Translation]

We know we are not finished, and the commitment continues to improve the lives of the men and women who have dedicated, even sacrificed, their lives to our peace and security.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Saint-Laurent certainly knows that the Liberals did not invent the wheel when it comes to the veterans reintegration, rehabilitation services, and vocational assistance program.

I was the veterans affairs critic in 2015-16. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent is a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Perhaps she should do her homework. Maybe she did, but is not saying. She talked about the increased benefits under her government, and if that is true then that is great, but we did the same thing. We increased all the benefits. The first time the charter came into effect, in 2006, it was under Mr. Harper's Conservative government. Most benefits were increased.

However, we did not make sweeping promises during an election. We never over-promised anything, not for any sector of society.

Unfortunately, the hon. member did not touch on what we are talking about. I would like her to answer the following: does she think that it was honourable of the Prime Minister to solemnly promise in 2015, hand on his heart, that veterans should never, ever have to go to court to fight for their rights, when this very government has now allowed its Department of Justice to take veterans back to court in the Equitas Society case? Does she think that is acceptable and that the Prime Minister was right to break his promise to veterans? That was a solemn promise.

Business of Supply

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, our government is making a lot of investments in the Department of Veterans Affairs. We have invested a lot of money in education to help soldiers transition to civilian life. We have reopened the nine offices that were closed by the Conservative government. A lot of cuts were made during the 10 years that Mr. Harper was prime minister. We are doing our best. Obviously, there were a lot of problems under that Conservative government and we are trying to play catch-up where needed.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I took the oath to become a member of Parliament, I understood fundamentally that it meant I would have to be accountable to the people in my riding, and that I would be privileged to hear stories that would be hard to hold and carry every day in this place.

Today, I am asking that member, a member who represents the Liberal government, about one of my constituents named Don. Don has been fighting with Veterans Affairs Canada since the 1980s. While serving this country, he was exposed to asbestos, and has long-term health concerns because of it. He still continues to fight with the department.

I am so sad today that the Prime Minister will not stand up and apologize to veterans who have served this country in faith. I am so upset that the Prime Minister will not stand up and apologize to people like Don, who lives every day of his life with an illness, and the Liberal government, like other governments before it, has not supported him.

Will you stand up, and make a commitment to Don that you will help?

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members to speak through the chair, and not directly to each other.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for representing her constituents well, as she should.

Our government is committed to helping veterans in whatever way we can. The people who are at all the service desks are committed to making a difference. They are not turning anybody away. No one has been turned away from receiving services, or for at last opening up a My VAC Account, which is basically the first step to receiving the services that they need.

I feel sorry for the member's constituent, Don. I hope we can make a difference. I have never heard of this person myself. As a member of the veterans affairs committee, I would love to hear from him in order to maybe bring his situation to light.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise today. I will be sharing my time with the member for Lakeland.

As usual, I would like to say hello to the many constituents of Beauport—Limoilou who are watching. Two months ago, as I was going door to door in Limoilou, I met a man who said that he listened to all of my speeches. He talked to me about how the festivals at Cartier-Brébeuf park cause noise disturbances. I want to say hello to him.

First, I would like to say that I am very passionate and care a lot about any issues that affect Canada's veterans, mainly for family reasons. On the Clarke side of the family, fathers and sons have served in the Canadian Armed Forces since 1890, and I was no exception. My great-grandfather, William Clarke, served in the First World War and the Boer War. My grandfather, Robert Clarke, served in the Second World War. My father, Patrick Clarke, served our country in Berlin during the German occupation in the 1970s. My brother, Anthony Clarke, served in Afghanistan in 2006 during the campaign in which most lives were lost. I served the country in the reserves and never went overseas. It is perhaps one of my biggest disappointments that I was not able to serve this beautiful country in times of war.

My colleagues opposite say that we, as Conservatives, should be embarrassed about how we treated veterans. However, I just shared my family's and my history, and I am in no way embarrassed to be a Conservative. I assure my colleagues opposite that I am being sincere. If the Conservatives had acted poorly towards veterans, I would admit it, if I were minimally honourable and capable of analyzing public policy—which I am. This is not at all the case, however, and I will have to talk about everything that we did for veterans. This is not the primary focus of my speech, but I have no choice, because all the Liberal members have been saying since this morning that the Conservatives were horrible to veterans. Our treatment of veterans is not the focus of this opposition day. Today's focus is the following:

That the House call on the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans for his insensitive comments at a recent town hall in Edmonton and show veterans the respect that they deserve by fulfilling his campaign promise to them, when he said on August 24, 2015, that "If I earn the right to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned".

Not only did the Prime Minister break this solemn promise in an egregious manner when he stated at a town hall in Edmonton that veterans were asking for too much, but he broke three other promises. The Prime Minister promised Canadians that, if they voted for him, he would restore lifetime pensions for veterans. He broke this promise because the lifetime pension established and presented by the Liberals before Christmas does not really restore the old lifetime pension. Most veterans who elect to pull out of the former system, which applies to those who fought before 2006, will not get 100% of the amounts they were receiving.

The Prime Minister also promised that veterans would not have to fight their own government to obtain the support and compensation they deserve. Yesterday, my great colleague from Barrie—Innisfil introduced a bill that proposes a covenant. It is a commitment, an agreement, or a contract. My colleague from Barrie—Innisfil probably wanted to enter into a proper contract with veterans by changing the Department of Veterans Affairs Act and compensation for the Canadian Armed Forces by amending section 4 of the act by adding the following:

...the Minister shall take into account the following principles:

(a) that the person, as well as their dependants or survivors, is to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness;

● (1335)

It is interesting, because the Prime Minister delivered a big speech here yesterday about the relationship that his government and Canada have with our brave indigenous peoples, who have been here for thousands of years. He said we do not need to change the Constitution, because section 35 already says that we recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. The Prime Minister said that instead, we need to change the way we view indigenous peoples and treat them with dignity and respect, and that is how we will give them the recognition they want.

However, that is exactly what my colleague from Barrie—Innisfil wrote in his motion on veterans. His motion called for the concept of treating veterans with dignity and respect to be incorporated into the act, so that bureaucrats and judges would take that concept into consideration when making decisions about veterans' benefits. Sadly, the Prime Minister voted against that motion yesterday. Is that not a shame?

I am disappointed, not only because the Liberals voted against this motion, but also because day after day in question period, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Prime Minister, and his veteran colleagues trot out the same hogwash about how the Conservatives treated veterans disgracefully. Those are lies.

Ours was the first government to implement the new veterans charter. We significantly increased virtually all of the compensation amounts. Every day in question period, rather than actually answering questions and apologizing for what the Prime Minister said, the Liberals spout off this kind of nonsense when what they should be doing is explaining how they intend to respect veterans, some of whom are meeting with a number of my colleagues outside.

Another thing I am disappointed about has to do with Bill C-357, a bill I introduced to create a grandfather clause for veterans wanting to transition to the public service. They could thus avoid having to work another five years to collect full retirement benefits. It is a very simple bill.

I have repeatedly requested a meeting with the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I even told him to forget about my bill and incorporate its amendments into the Treasury Board rules so that the 80 veterans who have to work an extra five years in Canada's public service to retire with dignity can benefit from the grandfather clause. The Minister of Veterans Affairs refused to meet with me. This would cost about \$2 million. That is peanuts.

As a final point, in response to my colleagues, I want to point out what we, the Conservatives, have done since 2006. First, we created the position of veterans ombudsman. Second, we announced clinics for veterans affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. Third, we established the Veterans Bill of Rights, which is on my desk in Beauport—Limoilou. On top of that, we announced additional funding to support operational stress injury clinics.

Furthermore, we created the atomic veterans recognition program. We launched an outreach campaign with community partners to identify and support homeless veterans in the Montreal area. In

Business of Supply

addition, in 2010, we created a community war memorial program, because once again, veterans often need recognition. We also introduced benefits for seriously injured veterans, including the earnings loss benefit, to increase monthly financial support.

All of that was introduced by the Conservative government, and that is not all. We also improved access to the career impact allowance, another measure created by the Conservative government. Is that not incredible? We also created a \$1,000 supplement to the career impact allowance for the most seriously injured veterans. That is another Conservative government measure. Lastly, let us not forget the flexible payment options for veterans and Canadian Forces members who are receiving a disability award. That is another Conservative government measure. Is that not incredible, Mr. Speaker?

Despite everything I just said, the bottom line is that the Prime Minister made a solemn promise in 2015, hand on heart and surrounded by top military brass who are now MPs. He said that veterans would never, ever have to fight in court for their rights.

● (1340)

That is what is going on. He broke his promise. There is nothing honourable about that. It is most unfortunate.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of unbelievable things in my hon. friend's comments. When I was thinking about running for office, in addition to the cuts the previous government made to veterans services, there was also over a billion dollars in lapsed funding, money the Conservatives promised and did not deliver, which was returned to the federal treasury to supposedly balance the budget.

What I also find unbelievable is this. Given all the wonderful things the member says the Conservatives did, why did the Equitas people take them to court? Why did the Conservatives not settle that before their time in office was done? Why were veterans turning their backs on the minister, who is a decent guy, and the former prime minister in the period leading up to the 2015 election? If all of the unbelievable things they did were so unbelievably good, why were we left with such a mess?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, we did not leave a mess. Concerning the Equitas Society, the hon. member for Durham came to a truce with them with dignity and respect, and said that when the Conservatives came back as the next government, they would continue to discuss together how to deal with this situation, which did not happen.

Business of Supply

The reality is that the Prime Minister went further in his campaign and did politics on the backs of veterans, on the back of this court case, as he did politics this week on the back of a court case in Saskatchewan. He is always doing that. He did that with *Equitas*. This is the basis of the discourse today. With his hand on his heart, he said that veterans will never, ever have to fight the government for their rights. Then he broke his promise. This is what is happening today. This is what we are fighting against.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague, who is always passionate about these issues.

We are talking about veterans and I find it ironic that the Conservatives, who closed nine regional Veterans Affairs offices, are criticizing the Liberals for not doing enough. Under the Conservatives, \$1.5 billion in funds allocated to veterans were never disbursed. That means that \$1.5 billion in services were never provided. There is the Blaszczyk case that was mentioned by the member who introduced the motion. The *Equitas* lawsuit was launched by disabled veterans against the Harper government, a Conservative government. The Conservatives should be careful about asking for an apology from the Liberals, because their hands are far from clean in this file.

Many veterans and members of the Royal Canadian Legion, of which there are five branches in my riding of Salaberry—Suroît, have suffered for two and a half years. They have been waiting for services for years. They have been waiting for two and a half years, but it started under the Conservatives. Without being partisan, we must all work on improving the services that should be provided to veterans. We have been waiting for more than two and a half years.

• (1345)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we hear a response, I want to remind hon. members that there are people giving discourses, asking questions, and getting answers, and I am hearing loud discussions across the floor. That is not a good way to do things. The rules allow for people to cross the floor, talk to each other in a whisper, and then go back, to respect the person who is answering the question.

I am looking forward to the answer from the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I too have a great deal of respect for my NDP colleague who makes very impassioned speeches.

I have two answers that are short and to the point. The new veterans charter is a new paradigm for the treatment of veterans. It is not perfect. I would say that if it were up to me, I would get rid of the new veterans charter and go back to the old system, which had better pensions. A veteran should not have to prove that he suffered. When he returns home from war let us just give him what he is owed.

This new paradigm was put in place by the Paul Martin government in December 2005. Ours was the first government to work with this new paradigm, whereby veterans carry the burden of proof. They have to prove that they suffered mentally or physically.

That is the problem. In the United States, the government has the burden of proof. If the Liberals want to improve the situation, they have to reverse the onus.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to be speaking to this motion today calling for the Prime Minister to apologize for his insensitive comments toward Canada's veterans.

I have to start with a simple comparison. During the last election, the Prime Minister said, "If I earn the right to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned." However, only a few weeks ago, when a young PPCLI vet in Edmonton asked the Prime Minister why the government is fighting veterans in court, the Prime Minister said that veterans are "asking for more than we are able to give right now". Is it any wonder that veterans are marching today in Ottawa, in Vegreville, and in Bonnyville, in Lakeland.

Like many Canadians, members of my family were and are veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces, and I am blessed to have gotten to know many veterans throughout my life. Canadian veterans are not always in uniform, but for those who still wear a uniform, and those who do not, they are and were Canada's best. Canadian veterans deserve the best from their country and eternal gratitude from all Canadians. They deserve the highest level of care and dignity from their government and from the department whose mandate is to serve them. I know that Lakeland constituents, like all Canadians, believe passionately that veterans deserve dignity and respect.

William McGregor, now in his 90s, served on the European front in World War II. William is from Bonnyville. He served Canada by helping to liberate France from the Nazis. William's distinguished service as a medic earned him the highest national order of France, a Knight of the Legion of Honour. Although William and one of his brothers survived storming the beaches of Normandy, his other brother did not and is now buried in France. William did not enlist as an 18-year-old to ask his country to give him anything in return. William still does not ask anything of his country.

Business of Supply

The veterans who have been forced to ask a court to give them the help they need are not asking for more than Canadians are willing to give. The Prime Minister's rebuke to veterans is shameful, and it simply does not at all reflect the concern, compassion, and respect of Canadians toward veterans. It is especially disappointing, given the Prime Minister's own lofty promises, and sadly, what were clearly empty words during the campaign.

What I hope we can all agree on is that we should not insult Canada's veterans when they are simply asking the Prime Minister to account for the difference between what he says and what he does.

Canadian soldiers owe us nothing. They have served us well. They and their families have a sacred bond with Canada, which is responsible to them in turn. Our job is not only to see those with whom Canada has made the sacred covenant be generally or usually treated with respect and dignity but to do what we can to ensure that this ethos informs every interaction between veterans and the government, on Canadians' behalf. However, yesterday, the Prime Minister and every Liberal member defeated a private member's bill that would have required the government to ensure that veterans and their families were treated with dignity, respect, and fairness, with consideration given to their unique experiences and sacrifices, and that any decisions regarding their care or treatment be made in a timely manner. This is a covenant that is in place in the U.S., the U.K., and other countries.

I would remind my colleagues that the House of Commons even unanimously supported a motion in 2015 that recognized the standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation between the Canadian people and the Government of Canada to provide the care and financial compensation needed by members of the Armed Forces who have been injured or disabled or who have died as a result of their military service. However, the Liberals defeated it.

The Prime Minister should, at the very least, always treat veterans and their families with dignity, respect, and fairness if they are not going to support putting those actions into law. The motion does not require anything unreasonable or burdensome for the Prime Minister. It is a simple request. It should be an easy decision.

Now, I want to be fair. Every member in this House has, and will, from time to time, make a mistake when speaking. There but for the grace of God go I. However, when we make a mistake, as the Prime Minister has clearly done, we should own up to it, and we should apologize.

My constituents who are veterans deserve this apology. They are veterans like Fred Roddick. Fred is from the border region between Lakeland and Battle River—Crowfoot. Fred flew Catalinas for the Australian air force and fought Nazi U-boats off the southern tip of Africa. In one engagement, six hours from the nearest land, he destroyed a U-boat and his plane took damage. With great determination and bravery, he piloted his damaged plane all the way back to land, a six-hour flight, carefully landed it using only half the landing gear, and returned his crew to their base safely.

There is also the story of Cliff Espetveidt, a farmer from Marwayne. He and his brothers signed up to serve because they saw what Hitler was doing in Europe, and they felt that they had to do

something about it. The brothers were initially stationed in England and were supposed to have gone to Dieppe as reinforcements, but they ended up in the Sicily campaign. Cliff tells of how his brother was shot twice, once by a sniper. He survived, but with scars and a hand that no longer worked. When the war ended, Cliff's unit was in Holland. The happiness and celebration eventually finished, and Cliff and his brothers returned to Marwayne. Life eventually went back to normal, but Cliff still keeps his memories, and his brother still keeps his wounds.

• (1350)

There are countless other veterans from across Canada and in Lakeland with stories just like Fred's, William's, and Cliff's, such as John Karmandy from Vegreville and Jack Leighton from Kitscoty. Their amazing stories only marginally reveal the nature of what Canada's soldiers experience in combat.

These men and women undergo terribly demanding training and evaluation preparing themselves mentally and physically for combat to put themselves at risk and to fight to prevent the loss of their own lives and the lives of their comrades. That is before a soldier, pilot, or sailor even arrives in a combat zone. To face daily the possibility that they may take a life or lose their own would undoubtedly leave a permanent mark on anyone. To then witness and experience horrors only seen on a battlefield, to personally lose limbs, senses, or the ability to fall asleep are experiences only others who have gone through it too can truly understand.

Canada asks this of members of the armed forces, and Canada needs people to serve. Canada asks them to suffer abroad so that we may not suffer at home and so we can live freely and safely. Veterans serve without asking to know the details or to know how everything will turn out. They do not even know to which combat zone they might be deployed. They simply sign up to serve.

There is no legitimate reason any member should oppose this motion. The Prime Minister said he would not force veterans to the courts to get the help they needed, and then when veterans were forced to the courts and asked him about it, he said they were asking for too much, saying that they were trying to take something that was not theirs. He must apologize.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks and gratitude to the member for Brantford—Brant, the member for Yorkton—Melville, and the members for Durham and Barrie—Innisfil for their dedication to Canada's veterans. I will support this motion, and I encourage all members of this House to join me in that effort.

Statements by Members

● (1355)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a debate about empathy, but it is fake empathy coming from the other side. It is as fake as the allegation of fake news. While we are talking about fake news, the NDP yesterday raised an issue about *Toronto Star* employees being laid off. That is a workplace in my riding, and I watched as the Conservatives laughed and clapped and made fun of the fact that 52 families in my riding lost jobs yesterday. They found that funny.

Let me remind the people opposite that when it comes to fake empathy, when they laugh, they are the first party to stand up for resource workers, and we stand with them in that regard. However, print journalists use paper, paper comes from pulp mills, and pulp mills rely on forestry workers. When they laugh at 52 families in my riding losing jobs, they are laughing at journalists, and they are laughing at resource workers.

When it comes to fake empathy, it is no different on the veterans file. The sheer hypocrisy, the sheer arrogance of the party opposite—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have a point of order.

The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 11 clearly mandates that members be relevant in debate and in questions and commentary.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): As I have said before in the House, I have heard both questions and answers and discourse go on and seem irrelevant, but the hon. members usually bring it around and bring it to the question at hand. I will leave it with the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York to come up with a question. He is almost out of time, so I will let him ask the question.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the fake empathy the members of the party opposite are capable of generating. The sheer hypocrisy, the sheer arrogance, the sheer capacity to lack all compassion for Canadians was evident in the fact that they fired Julian Fantino as veterans affairs minister because he did not stand up for veterans. They may have fired him. This party got rid of him from the House of Commons. This party will remember the laughter they had for Toronto workers who were laid off, just as we are going to remember and veterans are going to remember the contempt they had for the plight of veterans in this country.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to have triggered such anger and fury in my colleague with my words about veterans in my constituency today, speaking on behalf of Canadians who respect and believe that veterans deserve dignity. Thou doth protest too much, comes to mind.

Why do we not actually focus on the subject of this motion and actually listen to what veterans are saying about the Liberals and about the gap between the words they say and what they do?

The Equitas Society said that the position taken by the government was astonishing. For them to stand up and say that we do not have any special obligation to veterans is completely contrary

to everything they have said in Parliament and during the election campaign.

That is what a veteran said about the Liberals.

The Royal Canadian Legion said, “These sorts of words are extremely insensitive.” That is what veterans say about the Liberals.

Another one said, “The reality is—veterans aren't seeing that money.” That is what a veterans' advocate said about the Liberals.

I really hope the member will focus on the motion today and acknowledge that veterans deserve the dignity and respect we are calling for. It is high time. The Liberals have been in government for three years. They made promises they either never intended to keep or did not cost out, and they should be accountable for that. That is the focus of the motion today.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland will have one minute and 30 seconds remaining, perhaps time for one short question and answer, when the House next resumes this topic.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

2018 WINTER OLYMPICS

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, it gives me great pleasure to recognize our community's contribution to Canada's efforts in the 2018 Winter Olympics.

Competing in her third Olympic games, Kelsey Serwa of Kelowna is leading the charge for the women's ski cross. Kelsey won silver at the Sochi Olympics in 2014, and placed fifth at the Vancouver Olympics in 2010. Tess Critchlow will compete tonight in the women's snowboard cross. Julia Ransom of Kelowna competed in the women's biathlon. Ian Deans of Lake Country has been named an alternate for Team Canada's men's ski cross. Bob Ursel will coach the South Korean national men's curling team.

Currently, Canada's team is doing very well overall, with 13 medals, ranking third among all countries.

We are immensely proud of our team. Go Canada go.

* * *

● (1400)

2018 WINTER OLYMPICS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize northern B.C.'s own Denny Morrison.

Denny is no stranger to Canadians in this place, as he has had three previous appearances in three previous Olympics. However, he not just appeared and competed in previous Olympics, he also medaled with a bronze in Sochi, a silver in Sochi, a silver in Turin, and a gold in Vancouver.

Statements by Members

In my opinion, this is not his greatest achievement. Simply making it to Pyeongchang in 2018 is his highest achievement, after suffering near fatal injuries after a motorcycle accident a number of years ago.

I would like to list his injuries to highlight how great of a comeback this was: broken left fibula; broken right femur; punctured lung; tore the ACL in his knee; ruptured liver; lacerated kidneys; bruised heart; fractured ulna; broken kneecap; fractured a small bone near his spine; damaged intestines; a separated shoulder; sliced his forearm open, requiring 77 stitches to repair; cut across his quad; a concussion; and a damaged jaw. If that was not bad enough, he had a stroke a year later while training in Utah.

As Denny stated, “I had broken bones but I never broke.”

Denny is our hero, our Olympian. From all of us in Canada, go Denny go.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 53 years ago today, the Canadian flag was raised on Parliament Hill for the very first time. Today, our flag is the strongest symbol of our Canadian identity. That is why, every year on February 15, we celebrate National Flag of Canada Day.

[*English*]

In my riding of Charlottetown, which was recently recognized by law as the birthplace of Confederation, there is immense pride in our flag. This pride can be seen while driving through the streets of our beautiful city, seeing our maple leaf proudly flying from peoples' porches.

As our best and most talented athletes are currently wearing their red and white uniforms in Pyeongchang, this is perfect time to be celebrating the flag they so proudly wear.

[*Translation*]

I wish everyone in Charlottetown and across the country a very happy flag day.

* * *

[*English*]

CLAYTON MURRELL AND JOAN MACKINNON

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sometimes life just is not fair.

On February 3, a tractor trailer lost control on Highway 3 in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia and ran head-on into a truck, resulting in the deaths of Clayton Murrell and Joan MacKinnon. This tragedy has left their families, friends, co-workers, and the people of Cranbrook with a deep sense of loss. Memorials in front of the fire hall and community pool are testaments to how much they were loved.

Clay was a fire department captain and was well known for his kindness, his constant teasing, and for always asking, “What is the right thing to do?”

Joan was an aquatic supervisor with the Leisure Services Department, training hundreds of lifeguards. Her dedication was recognized with the Life Saving Society’s Outstanding Achievement Award. Her staff speak of Joan’s caring and grace, and her mantra, “Let it go”.

With Joan and Clay’s passing, heaven received two beautiful souls. We wish them much love, everlasting peace, and an endless trail ride.

Sometimes life just is not fair.

* * *

ACTIVE ADULT CENTRE OF MISSISSAUGA

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the grand reopening of the Active Adult Centre of Mississauga in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville.

The centre aims to enrich the lives of Mississauga seniors by keeping them active, independent, and involved in the community. It offers a colourful range of over 80 weekly social, recreational, health, and multicultural programs, such as yoga, line dancing, cooking classes, and a senior seminar on health.

The Active Adult Centre was established in 1992, thanks to a group of concerned citizens who wanted help to maintain a high-quality of life in the aging community. Since its inception, it has become a central hub for the community and currently has over 1,700 members.

As a charitable organization providing affordable and accessible programs, it goes out of its way to meet the diverse social and educational needs of its members.

I am a proud member of the centre, as it is open to those who are 50-plus young. I wish it another 25 years of success.

* * *

2018 WINTER OLYMPICS

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Pyeongchang 2018 Olympics, it seems that every opportunity we get we are watching our Canadian athletes compete in the Olympics, and we are continually impressed with their incredible talent and perseverance.

The number of bronze, silver, and gold medals keep going up each and every day. The first gold was won by the figure skating team, in which Canada’s opening ceremony flag bearers Scott Moir and Tessa Virtue led.

On Family Day, in Scott and Tessa’s skating hometown of Ilderton, the community centre will be packed as we cheer on Tessa and Scott in the ice dance event, and watch this dynamic ice dance team pursue yet another gold medal.

I thank all of our athletes as they represent this incredible country of Canada. We wish all of them every success.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

2018 WINTER OLYMPICS

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday was a golden day for Canada. Thousands of people in Newmarket—Aurora cheered on Team Canada's figure skaters as they danced their way to gold in the team event.

When all was said and done, Newmarket's very own Gabrielle Daleman stood atop the podium alongside her golden teammates.

Gabby is a two-time Canadian champion, and can now add Olympic gold medalist to her name, all by the age of 20. Gabby's performance was absolutely spectacular, the twists, the turns, the spins, and the impressive triple-toe jumps. Her performance made us all #hometownproud.

Gabby will next take to the ice on February 20, when the ladies single skating competition gets under way. Gabby can be sure that all of Newmarket—Aurora will be cheering her on as we watch live from the Newmarket Riverwalk Commons at 8 p.m.

I congratulate Gabby and wish her good luck. She makes all of us proud. Go, Gabby, go.

* * *

LOUIS RIEL

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the third Monday of February, celebrated in some other provinces as Family Day, Manitobans choose to commemorate a hero. Within his lifetime, his actions led to the foundation of our great province.

The first Louis Riel Day was celebrated on February 18, 2008. This decision was made in the face of decades of racism and marginalization of the Métis people. It was a decision to work toward reconciliation.

Today, Louis Riel is recognized as Manitoba's founding father. However, his legacy reaches far beyond the borders of our province. His story is the story of a true leader: brave, resilient, and unwavering in the face of racism and injustice.

On this day we invite all members to consider the unsung heroes of their communities and join us in celebrating the 10th Louis Riel Day.

* * *

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government changed the rules around which employers could qualify for funding for the students through the Canada summer jobs program by requiring applicants to sign on to the Liberals' values test.

I have spoken extensively to groups in Saskatoon—Grasswood. Let me share one of the many comments from my office.

Pastor Eldon Boldt wrote, "The concern is the intent to stop funding groups that oppose matters of conscience. This is a slippery slope for the Government to blatantly deny funding to groups who hold opposing values. What happened to diversity and tolerance?"

The right to freedom of belief and opinion is guaranteed by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I join my constituents in the call for the government to immediately remove this shameful attestation from the Canada summer jobs application.

* * *

[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a huge honour for me to help kick off Black History Month in my riding of Bourassa. At an event to honour community leaders in Montreal North, local social development agency Un itinéraire pour tous celebrated the dedication and involvement of eleven prominent Canadians of African descent.

I am proud to introduce them in the House of Commons of Canada. They are: Isabelle Alexandre, Micheline Cantave, Sheilla Fortuné, Rose-Andrée Hubbard, Guerline Rigaud, Roger Petit-Frère, Guillaume André, Williamson Lamarre, Don Harley Fils-Aimé, Wilmann Édouard, and Pierre Richard Simon

Every day, these honourees advocate for communal harmony, target school dropouts, and help immigrants integrate.

Congratulations to these honourees and to the organizers from Un itinéraire pour tous. Thank you for being role models.

* * *

●(1410)

FESTIVAL DU VOYAGEUR

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 16 to 25 is the time to celebrate and sing your heart out in Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. Léo La Tuque, the Festival du Voyageur's mascot, and his winter team have been working hard for months to prepare for this huge festival in downtown Winnipeg.

[English]

Whereas the more than 150 artists and musicians will have people's bodies swaying, it is the traditional French Canadian food will make their tastebuds sing. There is no other festival like western Canada's largest winter festival.

[Translation]

Grab your voyageur sash, your maple-taffy sticks, and your caribou, and come celebrate our history at the Festival du Voyageur. Hé ho!

Some hon. members: Hé ho!

Statements by Members

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, imagine if someone told us that the harder we work, the poorer we will become. That is exactly what governments tell people with disabilities. When they get jobs, they suddenly lose benefits and immediately start paying taxes, sometimes losing more than they gain. All parties and levels of governments are to blame.

The opportunity for workers with disabilities act seeks to solve the problem by requiring that Finance Canada calculate how much workers lose for every \$1,000 they earn. If they lose more than they gain, the finance minister would be required to propose changes to federal taxes and benefits to fix it. Provinces would be required to meet the same standard as a condition of receiving \$13 billion of social transfers.

While the bill would not micromanage provincial programs, it would instill one simple principle: that people with disabilities must always be allowed to earn more in wages than they lose in taxes and clawbacks.

* * *

SHOOTING AT FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Canadians are heartbroken for our American friends and neighbours. On behalf of all Canadians, I offer our deepest sympathies to the parents, families, and friends of the 17 victims who were killed yesterday at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. We wish a full recovery to all those who were injured.

Canadians were truly devastated to hear of this horrendous act. Our American friends and partners should know that all Canadians have them in our hearts today as we grieve the deaths of these innocent victims. We stand united during this tragic and difficult time.

* * *

HAVE A HEART DAY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I think of the future of our nation and the immense task of reconciliation, I am not only hopeful, I know better days are coming. Why? Because I have seen the future, and it is young people.

On Have a Heart Day, indigenous and non-indigenous youth across this nation are marching and organizing for the rights of indigenous children.

Being with the young people on the Hill today brought me back to that moment in 2008 when 13-year-old Shannen Koostachin, who had never seen a real school, made history when she called out the government and said that children were no longer going to live in third world conditions and hopelessness. Shannen never lived to see the beautiful school that bears her name, but the young people have taken up her fight. Their message to government has the same urgency: children have only one childhood and once it is gone, it can never be restored.

It is up to us as parents, adults, and politicians to make Shannen's dream and the dream of every indigenous child in our country a reality. Let us make it happen.

* * *

[Translation]

SCHOOL SHOOTING IN FLORIDA

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday morning, children got up, some perhaps more enthusiastically than others, to go to school, to learn, to see their friends, to grow.

No one imagined that the day would be marred by such a tragedy. Sadly, by the end of the day, 17 people were dead and 14 others had been injured in a shooting at a Florida high school.

This was an atrocious act that affects all of the families and friends who lost a loved one, as well as the whole community.

As a former teacher and principal, and as a father, I was shaken and profoundly moved by this tragedy. This kind of tragedy should never happen, still less in a school, a place where children have fun, study, socialize, and grow. For children, school is more than a place for learning. It is a place for living, where everyone should be able to feel safe.

Our thoughts are with the families and friends of the victims and the injured. We must never forget the 17 people who will never come home from school.

* * *

●(1415)

CANADA-CHINA YEAR OF TOURISM

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in December, I had the privilege of joining the Prime Minister's official delegation to China. During our trip, we promoted trade, deepened our bilateral ties, and officially launched the 2018 Canada-China Year of Tourism.

[English]

This year, more Chinese tourists than ever will experience our beautiful Rockies, breathtaking north, world-class cities, and our stunning east coast.

Tourism helps drive Canada's economy, supporting over 1.8 million jobs and 200,000 small businesses across the country.

There is no better time than now for visitors to experience Canadian hospitality and multiculturalism as we mark the upcoming year of the dog. The dog is an animal known for its friendship, loyalty, and kindness, traits that make Canada the successful and welcoming nation it is today.

This lunar new year, I wish all Canadians and visitors to Canada a joyous and jubilant year ahead.

Xin Nian Kuai Le. Gong Hey Fat Choy.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has disrespected and has not been honest with our veterans.

During the campaign, he said, “Liberals will honour our sacred obligation to veterans and their families.” He has done anything but honour them. Instead, he has insulted them by saying that they are asking for more than he can give. Our veterans have given so much, and the Prime Minister always seems to have something for everyone else.

Why will the Prime Minister not hear our veterans' legitimate concerns?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only have we heard the legitimate concerns of veterans, but we have also acted.

Canadians know that our government is committed to the well-being of veterans and their families. Our Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans deserve to know that they will be supported if they become ill or injured. Veterans were disillusioned by 10 years of neglect under the previous Conservative government.

Our government has invested over \$10 billion to increase compensation for pain and suffering, and to provide a pension for life, something we committed to Canadians. We will continue to support the brave men and women who served Canada and are now our veterans.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister can rant and rave and pat himself on the back all he wants, but he can tell that to veterans who are on the Hill today.

Maybe at the same time he can tell them why he and his colleagues voted against a bill yesterday that would restore respect, dignity, and fairness to our veterans. Maybe he can explain which of these three things he feels our veterans do not deserve. Maybe it is respect he thinks they do not deserve. Is it dignity he thinks they do not deserve? Is it fairness that he thinks they do not deserve?

What of those three things is too much to ask of the government?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we believe that those three things are exactly what our veterans deserve, and that is exactly what our government has delivered and will continue to deliver.

It is a bit ironic to hear a member who served in the previous Conservative government talking about respecting veterans. We will take no lessons from a party that cut staff, closed offices, and underfunded veterans programs.

We committed to reopening those offices. We committed to supporting Canada's veterans and to give them a pension-for-life option. That is what we have done. We will not stop continuing to support our veterans.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they say all the right things, but the irony is that the time to act was yesterday. They should have stood up and voted for the motion we moved.

While campaigning on August 24, 2015, our Prime Minister said that if he were given the mandate to govern the country as Prime Minister, veterans would not be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned. Now we know how that turned out.

Now that he is in office, why is the Prime Minister breaking yet another promise and turning his back on our veterans?

• (1420)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we are doing exactly the opposite of what my hon. colleague says we are doing.

We made solemn promises to veterans during the election campaign. We have not only kept our promises, such as the pension for life, but we will also continue to provide more support to the brave men and women who served this country. We will take no lessons from the former Conservative government.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, meanwhile, yesterday, all of the Liberals opposite remained seated when the time came to visibly demonstrate their support for veterans.

Here is an excerpt from the mandate letter that the Prime Minister gave to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It reads:

As Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, your overarching goal will be to ensure that our government lives up to our sacred obligation to Veterans and their families.

With regard to the disrespectful comments that the Prime Minister made to a veteran in Edmonton, will he show a modicum of respect and apologize to all veterans across Canada?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister was very clear during the election campaign, as were my Liberal caucus colleagues, and my colleague the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Everyone very clearly indicated that we respect the solemn obligation to our veterans. We kept our election promise regarding the lifetime pension. I hope members will agree that it is rather ironic to hear a Conservative Party member lecture us on respect for veterans. Perhaps he should talk to Julian Fantino about that.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is yet more lip service and yet another broken promise.

Oral Questions

To govern, a government must set priorities. One and a half years in, the Prime Minister still does not understand this. Then, he has the gall to tell a veteran in Edmonton that veterans are asking for too much money, when every day we learn about a new case of irresponsible spending and gifts to Liberal cronies. Take, for example, the temporary skating rink in front of Parliament, the \$1.1-million renovation of a minister's office, and billion-dollar deficits every year.

Here is the question everyone wants to ask: will the Prime Minister apologize?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should try to be consistent. He cannot criticize us for running a deficit and at the same time ask us to invest more to help veterans.

We have invested more than \$10 billion to support our veterans. We made solemn promises during the election campaign. We respect our veterans, unlike my colleague's party when it was in government. We will never stop doing more to support the brave women and men who serve in our armed forces.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, veterans are calling on this government to listen to them. Our veterans put their lives on the line for their country, and the least we can do is recognize their dedication and support them when they come back home, and yet successive governments, Conservative and Liberal, have been fighting veterans in court. The government is saying that they are asking for more than the government can give.

What happened to the Prime Minister who promised to do right by our veterans and give them the support they deserve? How can the Prime Minister and the government justify breaking this promise to our vets?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we were very clear in the election campaign, but more importantly, since we formed the government over two and a half years ago, that we respect the sacred obligation that Canada has toward our veterans.

Not only did we commit to a pension for life, which is something that my colleague, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, has delivered for the brave men and women who served in our Canadian Armed Forces, but we also committed to reopening offices closed by the previous government. We committed to increasing support for mental health services. We will never stop doing more to support the brave men and women who served in our armed forces.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then the government should stop fighting them in court.

[*Translation*]

Many other countries know exactly how much money they are losing as a result of tax evasion and tax avoidance, but here in Canada, that is definitely not the case. The parliamentary budget officer has to fight with the Canada Revenue Agency and the Liberal

government to get the documents needed to do this simple calculation. He has to threaten the CRA with legal action for it to do the slightest little thing. That is simply unacceptable.

In the House on Monday, the Prime Minister said that an agreement had been reached to finally provide the parliamentary budget officer with the necessary documents.

If that is the case, why will the Prime Minister not give those documents to parliamentarians in the House?

• (1425)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we promised Canadians that we would look into the tax gap, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Unlike our predecessors, we have opted for an evidence-based approach. The Canada Revenue Agency will provide the parliamentary budget officer with the documents requested, while respecting Canadians' privacy.

The CRA has published three studies since June 2016, and it held a conference on tax gap estimation here in Ottawa last summer.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals say they want to combat tax evasion, but the agreements signed with Grenada and Antigua and Barbuda clearly do the opposite.

To be clear, provisions in both agreements allow the active business income from a Canadian company's foreign affiliate to be paid to the Canadian parent company in the form of dividends that are exempt from Canadian taxes.

It could not be any clearer. It is written in black and white in the agreements.

How can the government and the minister defend such bad agreements?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear, tax cheats can no longer hide.

We are working closely with our international partners because this is a global problem for which there is no simple solution. We have fully adopted the global standard for the automatic exchange of information with OECD partners.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is the Liberals have signed the worst tax haven treaties ever, and they should not be proud of that at all.

Hundreds of millions of dollars are pouring into the cannabis industry from some of the world's most notorious tax havens. Liberals say that is okay. *The Guardian* newspaper reports that Canada is known as the land of snow washing where bad money goes to be laundered, all because of the strange inaction of the government.

Oral Questions

Why is the government refusing to crack down on tax havens? Is it because there are so many Liberal insiders involved? Why are they so irresponsible?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is firmly committed to combatting tax evasion. That is why we invested nearly \$1 billion in the past two budgets. The Canada Revenue Agency is now able to assess the risk of all large multinational corporations and every year, it reviews every transaction over \$10,000 in four offshore jurisdictions.

* * *

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on August 24, 2015, the Prime Minister made this pledge to veterans, “If I earn the right to serve this country as your prime minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned.” That is when he was trying to get elected. Now that he is in power, he is fighting our veterans in court, because they are asking for too much, but all they ever wanted was for him to keep his promise.

Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing, and apologize for breaking his promise to veterans?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the well-being of veterans and their families. Our Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans deserve to know they will be supported should they become ill or injured.

Veterans were disillusioned by 10 years of neglect under the previous government, and that is why our government invested over \$10 billion to increase compensation for pain and suffering, to increase income replacement for veterans on vocational or social rehabilitation, and for those veterans who cannot return to work. We have restored access to critical services, reopened nine offices, and hired 460 staff.

We are focused on their mental health and creating education opportunities. They deserve better than—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it possible to respect individuals and mislead them at the same time?

On April 20, 2016, the Prime Minister said, “I put forward a mandate letter to our Minister of Veterans Affairs that asked him to respect the sacred obligation we have as a country toward those who serve.” Yesterday, the Prime Minister stood in this House, and voted against respecting this sacred obligation. He and every Liberal member of this House should be completely ashamed of themselves.

Why should veterans believe any promise that this Prime Minister makes?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National

Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, committing to the well-being of veterans and their families, we have delivered on a promise for a pension for life option, a plan designed to help veterans live a full productive life post-service. The new pension for life option is a monthly payment for life. It is to recognize pain and suffering. It is tax-free, and provides replacement income of 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary indexed annually for life for those who need it.

The Conservatives had 10 years to make changes that veterans were asking for, and they did nothing but close offices, ignore veterans, and leave money on the table.

● (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 9, 2014, in a solemn and firm tone of voice, the member for Papineau said that “we have a sacred obligation to our veterans”. At the time, the member for Papineau claimed that as prime minister he would be the ultimate champion of our veterans' honour and rights.

Why then is he today shamefully renegeing on his promise made in 2015?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise once again to speak about what we are doing for veterans and their families. Here are a few examples. A retired aviator with five years of service who is 50% disabled would receive more than \$170,000 in compensation for pain and suffering over her lifetime. She would also have access to all veterans affairs offices, including the nine re-opened by our government, the new office in Surrey, and outreach services to the north. We listened and we took action.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what veterans have to say. Don Sorochan, lead counsel for Equitas Society, said that the government's position was astonishing and for the Prime Minister to stand up and say that we do not have any special obligation to veterans was completely contrary to everything he has said in Parliament and everything that he said during the election campaign.

What is worse, the Prime Minister and veteran Liberal candidates made a solemn promise in 2015, with their hands on their hearts, that veterans would never, ever have to go to court to defend their rights. Those were nothing more than empty words.

When will the Liberals make good on their promises?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is determined to pay tribute to the service and sacrifices of veterans and their families. We are constantly working to give veterans and their families the care and support they need, when and where they need it, as well as to encourage Canadians to remember those who served. We continue to listen to veterans and work with them, their family members, and stakeholders across the country. In budget 2016, our government invested over \$5.7 billion to restore access to essential services and provide better compensation for veterans.

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary cares. I know she has family members who serve, so I would ask her to put down the talking notes, stop talking about hypothetical veterans, and make this pledge to the House. There are real veterans that the Prime Minister is forcing to go to the Supreme Court of Canada because of his broken promises.

Will the parliamentary secretary commit to the House to end the Equitas lawsuit?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his service to our country. I talk to veterans every day, and I am committed to those veterans. Those veterans call me all the time, and they are frustrated, because why? That previous government brought them to court in 2012. We are committed to serving those who served in the forces, and I have the great pleasure of discussing that with them directly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Durham will come to order. I know he wants to hear the exchanges. We need to have quiet, so we can hear both sides of the exchanges.

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was actually that party that restarted the Equitas lawsuit. There was \$10.5 million for Omar Khadr, billions for pet projects, billions outside of Canada, including \$500 million to China to build infrastructure in that region.

It is amazing at how much light speed money flies out the Liberal door for other countries, but when our veterans ask for what they are promised, the Prime Minister says they are asking for more than we can give them.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to veterans for that comment?

• (1435)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some numbers too: \$10 billion that went to veterans, 10 offices reopened that were previously closed by that government. We have made commitments to the Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, and their families. We have delivered on them. In two short years, we have made great progress, but there is so much more to do.

As I said earlier today in the House, I asked all parties to come together for our common cause to support our brave men and women in uniform who wore that flag on their shoulders.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we learn that the TPP text is still not ready, and the side letters will not be made public until the agreement is signed. The Liberals promised to be transparent on trade, but they continue to be silent on exactly how the TPP will affect our industries and workers.

Shockingly, we also learned that the Liberals' progressive trade agenda is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. This deal has no indigenous chapter, no gender chapter, and no improvements to the labour chapters.

For all their talk, what exactly do the Liberals think is progressive about the TPP?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her hard work on the committee.

This morning I informed the committee, and she will recall, that for the first time, the TPP will have an enforceable chapter for labour and the environment. This is a great achievement for Canada. This is something that this government realized, because we improved on the texts that were left by the Conservative government.

This agreement, as the member will know, will open up a market of 495 million people, 14% of the world economy. We should all be proud that we are opening markets that will provide prosperity for Canadians from coast to coast.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the most problematic aspects of chapters 12 and 19 of the trans-Pacific partnership is the possible emergence of an underclass of vulnerable, exploitable foreign workers. They will not be eligible for permanent residence or citizenship in Canada, and businesses will be able to exploit them. The Liberals have not said a word about how that will affect workers now arriving in Canada and those who are already here.

What are the Liberals doing to ensure that businesses will not try to cut costs by exploiting underpaid employees rather than hiring properly trained Canadian workers?

Oral Questions

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Canadians want an ambitious trade agenda that does not sacrifice the environment or workers. That is why the trans-Pacific partnership includes chapters on the environment and workers' rights that can be strengthened. I think the member should be happy that, for once, we stood up for workers in Canada and we will continue to do so in all of our trade agreements.

* * *

MARIJUANA

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, come hell or high water, the Liberal government is determined to see marijuana legalized by July 1, 2018.

What is the rush? Police chiefs, psychiatrists, and the provinces are asking for more time to prepare. The Prime Minister, meanwhile, is ploughing ahead blindly, not listening to anyone, or so it seems.

Today, we find out there are millions of dollars at stake, money that comes from tax havens and the Prime Minister's Liberal pals. What is good for the Liberal Party's coffers is not necessarily good for young Canadians. Something smells fishy.

When are the Liberals going to stop turning a blind eye to money from tax havens?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is legislating and strictly regulating access to cannabis to keep it out of the hands of our youth. We are taking action today to keep profits out of the hands of criminals. The current approach is not working. It has enabled criminals to make money, and it has not kept cannabis out of the hands of our youth.

In many cases, it is easier for our children to buy cannabis than to buy cigarettes. That is why, after extensive consultations, our government tabled the bill to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to cannabis.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see a Liberal scandal on the horizon.

While the Prime Minister tries to persuade us that legalizing pot is supposed to fight organized crime, the media are reporting that 40% of the money invested in Quebec in companies that will produce marijuana comes from tax havens. That means it is impossible to know who the investors are, although we know that many Liberal cronies have both hands in the cookie jar.

Can the Prime Minister table a list of investors in the House, or will we be forced to demand—

• (1440)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear that any individual or organization that controls more than 25% of an organization involved with cannabis will have to be subject to a full security clearance.

Let us be clear. The current regime is an absolute failure. Cannabis has the highest use among youth anywhere in the world, and 100% of the profits currently go to illicit organized crime. In the United States, the number has gone all the way down to 28%, in states that have legalized it. We want 0%.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, provinces, municipalities, police services, and health authorities are all struggling with unanswered questions to meet the Prime Minister's deadline for the legalization of marijuana. Meanwhile, Quebec media reports say hundreds of millions of dollars are flowing anonymously into Canadian marijuana companies from tax havens, and by companies connected to Liberal insiders.

What steps is the Prime Minister taking to ensure that the legal marijuana trade does not start off being financed by dirty money laundered by Liberal insiders?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very clear and I will reiterate. Any individual or organization that has more than 25% interest will be subject to background checks, and that does not matter if it is Julian Fantino or any other individual.

Second, organized crime today controls 100% of the profits, that is \$7 billion. It is a situation that is utterly unacceptable. We have one of the worst records in the world. The previous tactics did not work. We want to see 0% in the hands of organized crime.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister patted himself on the back for the money he claimed was going toward fighting offshore tax evasion. We know that most of the \$24.5 billion that the CRA says it plans to find will mostly be domestic, and will probably never be collected. Meanwhile, millions of dollars of mystery money are pouring into Liberal connected marijuana companies.

Is this what taking organized crime out of marijuana looks like?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell that member what taking money out of organized crime does not look like, the last 10 years of Conservative government, where \$20 million-a-day went into the hands of organized crime, or \$7 billion a year. It funded gangs and funded violent activity in our country. It is utterly unacceptable. That is why Canadians voted for a new approach.

We are utterly committed to following the example of what we have seen in other jurisdictions where legalization has radically shrunk the amount of money going to organized crime. No number is low enough for us. We want 0%.

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope and others know the standing order that provides that we are not to interrupt when someone else has the floor and we are to wait until we have the floor before we speak around here.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals like to talk about how Canada is a world leader when it comes to LGBTQ rights, but we have seen no action from this government on the rapid deterioration of the rights of those communities in Indonesia.

The Indonesian parliament is about to criminalize LGBTQ communities by subjecting them to sentences of up to 12 years in prison.

Has the government made any attempt to convince the Indonesian government not to go ahead with this major setback for LGBTQ rights?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is an ardent defender of LGBTQ2 rights in Canada and around the world.

That is why we appointed a special adviser on LGBTQ2 issues, my colleague. We have made welcoming LGBTQ2 refugees a priority in our initiative to resettle over 47,000 Syrians in Canada. On countless occasions, we have spoken out against the persecution, torture, and murder of LGBTQ2 people around the world, and we will continue to do so.

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how someone could be ardent and silent at the same time.

When my partner and I lived in Indonesia, it was a nation that prided itself on secularism, pluralism, and tolerance. A year ago, my partner and I wrote a personal letter to the President of Indonesia, expressing concern about the emerging campaigns of hatred and violence directed at the LGBTQ community. This week Indonesia is debating a law that would criminalize our community. This will place our family, friends, and more than 20 million Indonesians at risk of discrimination and violence.

Will the Prime Minister join me in expressing concern directly to Indonesia's president about this attack on LGBTQ rights and safety?

● (1445)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the promotion and protection of the human rights of all people is essential to our international engagement, and we will always condemn the persecution of LGBTQ2 communities and individuals, wherever it takes place around the world.

We have been a tireless advocate for the LGBTQ2 community. We have introduced legislation to protect the rights of LGBTQ2 people in Canada. We have prioritized LGBTQ2 refugees. We have added a gender X designation on the Canadian passport. We have repeatedly deplored their persecution around the world.

Our record speaks for itself when it comes to LGBTQ2 communities.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians' confidence in our electoral system is vital for our democracy. They know that one of the best ways to build and maintain that confidence is with openness and transparency.

Five years ago our party led the way by being the first to disclose our members' expenses online. All other parties have followed our example. We are once again leading the way forward with stronger standards in political fundraising.

Can the Minister of Democratic Institutions please update the House on the efforts she has already made to make political fundraising more open than ever before?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased that the House passed Bill C-50 at third reading this week, legislation that represents the next step in the strengthening of our political fundraising rules, making fundraising events involving ministers and party leaders more open and transparent than ever before.

I was disappointed, however, that the official opposition voted against openness and transparency in fundraising. However, I look forward to the next step and the progress of making sure that Canadians have more information than ever before when it comes to political fundraising events here in Canada.

The Speaker: I am getting the impression the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil did not hear what I was saying about not interrupting. I know he knows the rules and I am sure he will want to not do that in future.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, the Prime Minister warned about the “chances of getting that pipeline built”.

Also this week, the Prime Minister said he is “making sure that we come to the right place that’s in the national interest.”

I thought the Liberals approved the Trans Mountain expansion in 2016 because it is in the national interest. Maybe the minister could tell us why the Prime Minister is now wavering on whether the pipeline is in the national interest right now, and on whether it is going to get built?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is the same on Thursday as it was on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of this week, and all last week.

The Prime Minister has been unwavering in his support of the pipeline. Why is it in the national interest? It creates jobs and it expands our export markets. At the same time, we invested an unprecedented \$1.5 billion in an oceans protection plan that is world class. At the same time, we co-developed with indigenous people the way in which we can make sure this is done in a safe way.

Why can the hon. member not take yes for an answer?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all these answers are not actually getting the pipeline built. Liberals should take action, and we asked for a plan. The Prime Minister says he is going to “stand up for the federal government’s role and responsibility”, but on Wednesday, he and every single Liberal voted against telling Canadians exactly what he is actually going to do.

Is the Prime Minister trying to buy himself some time or does he simply lack the resolve to get it done?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members of the government have said in Vancouver; Calgary; Edmonton; Regina; St. John's, Newfoundland; Montreal; Toronto; and Mississauga that we believe that this pipeline is good for Canada. It is not only a good project for Alberta and British Columbia. It is good for all of Canada. It is good for the energy sector. It is good to expand our export markets. It is good for reconciliation with indigenous people. It is a good project and I am glad the member agrees.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's failure to bring provinces together is sabotaging the Trans Mountain expansion. The Prime Minister declares support, but does nothing. It is no wonder oil and gas companies are packing up and heading south. This project is in Canada's vital national interest. It will create jobs and opportunity across the country. Every day of inaction creates a climate of uncertainty.

When will the Prime Minister give us a plan to get this pipeline built and finally show some leadership?

• (1450)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Speaking of plans, Mr. Speaker, in October, in Winnipeg, there was a conference called Generation Energy, to which 650 people came from every corner of Canada and all around the world: Norway, the United States, Germany, indigenous leaders, oil and gas leaders, those involved in renewable energy, academics, members of the New Democratic Party. The only people who did not show up for the Generation Energy conference were members of the official opposition.

What is their interest in the future of Canada's energy sector?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's inaction—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore has the floor. She wishes to ask a question and I am going to ask her to start now.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's inaction is threatening to kill the Trans Mountain pipeline project. He has done nothing to de-escalate an all-out trade war between provinces and is risking our national unity. The Liberals clearly have no plan, except for crossing their fingers and wishing for the best.

When will the Prime Minister put his foot down and stand up for the tens of thousands of jobs that this project would create?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the Generation Energy conference in Winnipeg, at which

650 Canadians were present, we talked about the future of energy in Canada. We talked about a transition to a low-carbon economy. We talked about the importance of traditional sources. We talked about the oil and gas sector. We talked about job creation, and Canada's responsibility in the world. This was one of the most important conversations that we have had in Canada about our energy future. It is too bad the members of the opposition did not show up.

The Speaker: The hon. opposition House leader will come to order.

The hon. member for Vancouver East.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's immigration law discriminates against people with disabilities. Even the Minister of Immigration admits that this law does not align with Canada's values on the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The minister has been studying this issue since 2016. Committee members from all political parties agree that this law needs to be repealed. Still, there is no action. An impacted family member said, “I always thought Canada did not discriminate against people because they are different”.

Will the minister adopt my private member's bill as a government bill and end this injustice?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her work on this really important issue.

As the member opposite knows, we are conducting a fundamental review of the policy to make sure that this policy continues to fit into our government's accessibility agenda. I have said it on the record and I will repeat it. The 40-year-old policy is out of step with our overall government's accessibility agenda, but we have to continue consulting with provinces and territories to make sure that we get it right. Part of the reason we were waiting is to also hear from the citizenship and immigration committee, of which the hon. member is a member.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the Prime Minister spoke about his government recognizing and respecting aboriginal rights, yet his government has spent over \$19 million of Canadian taxpayers' money in litigation, fighting against the recognition and implementation of the rights of five Nuu-Chah-Nulth nations on the west coast of Vancouver Island to catch and sell fish.

The Liberals must put words into action. They must do as they said yesterday, and truly recognize and respect indigenous rights. When will the government stop seeking to redefine and diminish the rights of these five first nations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister reaffirmed our commitment to reconciliation and a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples as we look to create a recognition and implementation of rights framework.

The work has already begun. This morning, I was pleased to extend an offer to the five nations to facilitate the transfer of licences and quotas for groundfish, salmon, and shellfish. This is a concrete action, taken in the spirit of reconciliation. I look forward to doing more with indigenous peoples on the west coast and right across the country to advance this important issue.

* * *

• (1455)

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just before Christmas, the Department of Finance issued a report on the state of public finances. According to this report, the budget will not be balanced until 2045. Need I remind members that those people over there promised a balanced budget by 2019? They were only off by 26 years. Wow.

Since the budget is going to be tabled shortly, could we have some indication of when we can expect a balanced budget? Will it be in 2019, as they promised, will it be in 2045, as the finance department projects, or does no one know, as the Prime Minister has previously said?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, because it gives me an opportunity to remind members that we made a very clear commitment to Canadians during the election campaign. That commitment was to invest in our economy, in infrastructure, and in progressive programs like the Canada child benefit, which is lifting 300,000 children out of poverty and has helped Canada post its highest growth in 15 years. That was the fastest growth rate in the G7, after a decade of failures on employment, exports, and growth.

We have nothing to learn from that side of the House.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the finance minister inherited great fortune, a balanced budget from the previous government, oil prices which had doubled, a booming world economy, and a ferociously hungry American economy buying up goods, and yet they are blowing it. The deficit is twice what they promised, and the budget will not be balanced until a quarter-century after they said it would.

Will next year's budget deficit stay under \$6 billion, as the Prime Minister promised?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear the member say

Oral Questions

that to Christine Lagarde, the president of the International Monetary Fund, who said that Canada's approach with regard to its economy under this government should go viral, because when interest rates are low and when the economy was sluggish, like the one we inherited from the Conservatives, it is good to make smart investments, to invest in infrastructure, invest in the future, invest in innovation, and invest in our communities, which is what we have done.

The results speak for themselves, with close to 600,000 jobs created in the last two years. We have no lessons to hear from them.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that big international bankers would be delighted with the economic policy of the government. This big borrowing government is the delight to any wealthy bond holder that wants to make money off the interest payments that taxpayers will be forced to give them. Therefore, it is no surprise that Christine Lagarde, and others like her, would be supportive of this policy.

We stand on the side of the working-class taxpayer who has to pay bills in this country. When will the government do the same?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder who was the working-class Canadians they were thinking about when they doubled the TFSA limit, which would have benefited the wealthiest—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. It is always nice to see the House in a good mood on Thursdays.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I wonder how many of their constituents have \$11,000 at the end of the year to put in their TFSA limit? They cheered for that, just like they cheered for sending cheques to families of millionaires.

We decided to take a different approach to help those who need it the most, with the Canada child benefit, and with GIS for seniors, where we are helping 900,000 seniors with close to \$1,000 more a year. Those are the steps we have taken to make the economy work for everyone.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, countries are increasingly relying on unique comparative advantages and on their specialities to foster economic development.

Canada has several talent-rich sectors, which means that our country is well positioned to be a future leader.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development explain what the government is doing to capitalize on our talents?

Oral Questions

• (1500)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, for his question.

We committed to investing up to \$950 million to grow our innovation sector, and we received some bold, ambitious strategies to revitalize our regional economies.

The five superclusters announced today include more than 300 SMEs, 60 post-secondary institutions, and 180 other participants in Canada's innovative sectors. They should generate more than 50,000 new middle-class jobs.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of the recent earthquake in Taiwan, among them two Canadians. On behalf of the official opposition, our deepest sympathies are with all of those who have been affected by this tragedy. At a time when nations should be coming together, the government on the mainland pushes ahead with its anti-Taiwan actions without even a respectful pause.

Can the government update the House on how Canada is helping Taiwan in its time of need, and explain why it has yet to join most other nations in expressing public acknowledgement of and solidarity with those killed in this tragedy?

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly we extend our deepest sympathies, as have members of our government in the House, to the people of Taiwan. At the same time, we are moving forward with an ambitious agenda to build a stronger relationship with China. We always focus on the promotion and protection of human rights when we meet with our Chinese counterparts, and we ensure that we work with them to expand the relationship, as members of this government have done at every level when meeting with their counterparts in China.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four weeks ago the Prime Minister did a little tour of the Quebec City region and promised four icebreakers to Davie shipyard workers.

For four weeks these workers have been desperately waiting for the government to tell them whether they will get their jobs back or not. For four weeks, the government has been hemming and hawing. It feels as though the government is marking time. A promise is one thing, but a signed contract would be even better.

When will the Liberal government stop twiddling its thumbs, keep its promise, and bring back hundreds of good jobs for the Quebec City region?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Davie shipyard is a major shipyard and we recognize the expertise of its workers. They did an excellent job delivering the *Asterix*.

I have had positive and productive meetings with Davie shipyard's management and unions. We have started discussing options with Davie shipyard to meet the needs of the Canadian Coast Guard for interim icebreaker capacity. I am confident that our discussions with Davie will be fruitful.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that far too many indigenous children in this country face immense challenges in comparison to non-indigenous children, especially when it comes to health supports and services. We can and must close this unacceptable gap that exists. Can the Minister of Indigenous Services please update the House on how Jordan's principle is being fully implemented to address these issues?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that no first nations child goes without the care he or she needs. Since November 2015, we have been able to approve 33,000 new requests for children under Jordan's principle, with over 99% approval rate. Last week, I was pleased to announce that we now have a new 24-7 call centre, a Jordan's principle call centre, to make sure that families can easily access quality care and that no child goes without the care he or she needs.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the Minister of Public Services and Procurement on her Taxpayers Federation Teddy nomination for government waste for the Liberal Phoenix fiasco. It is two years in and already almost half a billion dollars over budget. Despite this never-ending drain on the taxpayers, it has come to light that 100% of seagoing Fisheries and Coast Guard employees are impacted. When is the minister going to stop repeating empty platitudes, do her job, and fix the Liberal Phoenix fiasco?

• (1505)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, I am happy to share that award with the previous government. It was the previous government, of course, that treated the Phoenix pay system as a cost-cutting measure instead of the massive enterprise-wide initiative that it was.

We are doing, step by step, the things that the previous government should have done, including being completely committed, no matter what the cost, to paying our public servants what they deserve.

Government Orders

[Translation]

MARIJUANA

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly, municipalities, psychiatrists, everyone agrees that the legalization of pot is moving too quickly, but Ottawa does not care and is even putting pressure on the Senate to speed things up.

The only thing that matters to the Liberals, is the money that their friends are going to make with pot. The fact that that money comes from tax havens does not seem to be a problem.

When will the Liberals put the public interest ahead of their friends' interests?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current approach to cannabis is not working. It has allowed criminals to profit and has not kept cannabis out of the hands of our children.

The cannabis act will come into force this summer, in 2018, subject to parliamentary approval. The cannabis act will create a strict legal framework to control the production, distribution, sale, and possession of cannabis in Canada.

We respect the work of senators and we are always available to answer their questions.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question was more about tax havens.

Newspapers are asking the Liberal government for help, but what are the Liberals doing? They are using over half of their advertising budget for ads on Google and Facebook, companies that do not pay taxes.

Not only is the government undermining quality journalistic information by failing to support our newspapers, but it is also giving money to web-based multinationals in tax havens. That is outrageous.

What is Ottawa waiting for? When will it stop rewarding tax evasion? Is it waiting for all of our newspapers to shut down?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, local information is very important for our government and, of course, it is essential to our democracy. That is why we have reinvested in our public broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada, which has extended its coverage to communities like those in the Magdalen Islands. It has also opened new local stations in Kelowna, Saskatoon, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, and Hamilton.

We are also modernizing the Canada periodical fund to better support local media and ensure that they can make a healthy transition to digital. The government must take a targeted approach that respects journalistic independence.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the government. I hope I will get a better answer than the ones we got during question period. We shall see.

Can the government House leader share the government's plans for the rest of the week and for the week following our constituency week?

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the opposition House leader for the Thursday question.

Today was a great day for Canadians as we announced our supercluster strategy, and I am sure they appreciated hearing those results.

This afternoon we will continue the debate on the Conservative opposition day motion.

Tomorrow, the House will not be sitting to accommodate the NDP convention this weekend.

The Speaker: Order. I am going to have to ask the hon. government House leader to wait a moment. The interpretation is not working.

Now it is working again, I gather. The hon. government House leader may continue.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Upon our return following the constituency week, we will have two allotted days, the first on Monday, and the other on Thursday.

[Translation]

On Tuesday, we will consider Bill C-69, the environmental assessment act. As the Minister of Finance announced in the House on Tuesday, the budget speech will be held on Tuesday, February 27. Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of this motion at 4 p.m. We will also have the first day of debate on the budget the following Wednesday.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

●(1510)

[English]

CREE NATION OF EYYOU ISTCHEE GOVERNANCE AGREEMENT ACT

(Bill C-70. On the Order: Government Orders:)

February 14, 2018—The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Bill C-70, An Act to give effect to the Agreement on Cree Nation Governance between the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and the Government of Canada, to amend the Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-70, An Act to give effect to the Agreement on Cree Nation Governance between the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and the Government of Canada, to amend the Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be deemed read a second time and referred to a committee of the Whole, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill deemed read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC) moved:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Brantford—Brant, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, February 26, 2018 at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask for the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion, but, with your indulgence, I would first like to provide a little bit of context for the House.

Canada has signed two new tax information exchange agreements with recognized tax havens, and the intent of these agreements is clear. We have been told that the agreement will trigger the application of Canada's taxation laws, which means that the active business income from a Canadian company's foreign subsidiary can be paid to the Canadian parent company in the form of dividends that are exempt from Canadian taxes.

Considering that the policy on tabling of treaties in Parliament provides for a 21-day period before the House can rule on these treaties, I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House for the

following motion: that this House, pursuant to the procedure described in the policy on tabling of treaties in Parliament, refuse to consent to the passage of the agreement between Canada and Grenada for the exchange of information on tax matters and the agreement between Canada and Antigua and Barbuda for the exchange of information on tax matters.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—VETERANS AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I rise today to speak to the opposition day motion and put the record straight.

Our Prime Minister did indeed pledge to Canadians to do more to support our courageous and valiant veterans and their families.

In August 2015, he said:

For 10 years, Stephen Harper has been nickle-and-dime our veterans, lacking the respect and the support that Canadians have earned through service to country and that's something that we have to fix as a priority.

He promised that the government would ensure veterans received the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserved and he tasked the Minister of Veterans Affairs to deliver on that promise. Our government acted right away.

In two years, our Liberal government has delivered on a number of measures to accomplish this. With Budget 2016, we enhanced the financial security of veterans and their families, putting more money into their pockets. This included increasing the disability award from a maximum of \$310,000 to \$360,000, which saw more money for 67,000 ill and injured veterans and increased income replacement from 75% to 90%.

Budget 2017 supported the health and well-being of veterans and families by investing in mental health supports, educational opportunities, and career transition services. These new and enhanced services are about to take effect.

April 1, will be the day that six new and two enhanced programs and services for veterans will go into effect: career transition services; the veterans' education and training benefit; the caregiver recognition benefit; a veteran and family well-being fund; a new veteran emergency fund; the end of time limits for vocational assistance for survivors; expanded access to military family resource centres for all veterans and their families; and a centre of excellence on post-traumatic stress disorder and related mental health conditions.

Business of Supply

There is one unifying purpose of these initiatives, in fact, for everything Veterans Affairs Canada does, and that is the well-being of veterans, and their families as well. If a veteran cannot do well, the family does not do well either. Not only do these new programs add resources and services, they form an integrated, complete package that provides financial security and promotes and supports well-being of the veteran's whole life.

For example, as of April 1, all medically released veterans and their families will have access to the 32 military family resource centres across Canada. Up until now, the MFRCs have been available only to current members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families.

This independent organization provides a wide range of services, including community orientation, parenting workshops, child care, information and referral, employment and educational assistance, and a host of personal growth and development programs. Having access to these will help veterans manage their successful transition to post-service life and integrate into their new community.

The new caregiver recognition benefit recognizes the vital contributions of those who look after ill and injured veterans, with up to \$1,000 per month, tax-free, paid directly to them.

Also, as of April 1, the one-year time limit for survivors, spouses, and common-law partners to apply for the rehabilitation services and vocational assistance program will no longer apply. This change removes unnecessary pressure and gives families more flexibility for getting the training they need while they are caring for ill and injured veterans.

● (1515)

For urgent, unforeseeable situations that might arise in the life of a veteran and their family, there is a new veterans emergency fund to help cover the costs of unexpected expenses.

For many Canadian Armed Forces members, finding meaningful employment will be key to establishing in life after service. While Canadian Armed Forces members have extensive training and skills tested under high pressure, finding a career to put these skills to use outside the military can sometimes be a challenge. The new career transition service will provide eligible veterans aptitude testing, training in job search skills, resumé writing and interview techniques, and other services they may need.

There is also new support for veterans who want further education or training. Those who have six years of service can receive up to \$40,000 for college, university, or technical education. Those with 12 or more years of service can receive up to \$80,000.

Another essential part of establishing a post-service life is physical and mental health. Over the past two years, our Liberal government has invested significantly in improving health support and services for veterans. We are investing \$17.5 million over the next four years, and continuing with \$9.2 million per year after that to establish a centre for excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions.

The government, under the leadership of the minister, is ensuring the department is committed to providing comprehensive, integrated, and consistent mental health care. The centre for excellence will therefore focus on research and development into new tools to

support professional treatment of PTSD, and then transfer the knowledge to professionals across the country.

All the programs reinforce each other: physical and mental health services for the veteran and their family to support well-being; education support to help establish a new career after service; career transition services to help find meaningful employment; support for families, including money when they need it; recognition for caregivers; and counselling and support to help integrate into their new community. All can be tailored to meet a veteran's unique needs.

It is a journey this government continues with legislation that will fulfill the promise this government made in 2015 to restore the option of monthly payments for veterans with service-related illness or injury, an option taken away from veterans by the previous government. The pension for life option will become another integral part of the well-being package for veterans when it comes into force, and will substantially improve the financial benefits veterans receive.

Pension for life will represent an investment of nearly \$3.6 billion in support of veterans, in addition to nearly \$6 billion this government committed in the previous two budgets. This government has invested significant time and resources to ensure the men and women who have served our country receive the respect, support, and care they deserve.

This government listened when military and veteran families, advocates, and communities raised concerns about the benefits and programs they were receiving. We listened, we heard them, and we responded with a comprehensive plan to restore and enhance benefits with plans and services designed to make lives better for our veterans and their families.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House to remind veterans how much we appreciate all they have sacrificed for us. It is a well-known fact that young veterans, those who have recently returned from the front lines, live in isolation to an extent. They certainly deserve our attention, our engagement, and the debate we are having today.

How can my colleague across the way justify having two classes of pensions for our veterans? How can she add insult to injury in this situation?

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to figure out what these two classes of pensions are. We have created a pension for life. We are looking after the mental health, physical health, and well-being of these veterans. Our government has done a tremendous amount in two years, with an investment of \$10 billion for so many programs. I believe we are on the right trajectory.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, veterans and veterans issues have consistently been a high priority for this government, virtually since day one when we made significant commitments. I will go over some of those commitments in the 2016 t budget. Even before that, in opposition, we continuously raised the issue of veterans. One of those issues was the closing of offices across the country, which we committed to reopening them.

Could my colleague provide her thoughts on why it was so important we reopened those offices?

• (1525)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad my colleague from Winnipeg North brought this up. The previous government had the most toxic relationship with veterans during its 10 years in office. It took them to court. It closed down offices. It did not invest in veterans.

We have listened to veterans. We listened to what they had to say about the pain they were suffering. We decided they deserved respect because they had served our country.

We can do more and as a collective body, we should be able to achieve that.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to be asking this question, and participating in the debate today.

My hon. colleague mentioned the importance of military families like mine. Could she elaborate on the importance of continuing that support for military families and military members when they leave the Canadian Armed Forces and become veterans, and on our commitment to the MFRCs?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member and her family for their service to our country.

I hear from veterans in my riding about how difficult it is to integrate into life after service. It is important we look after not only their mental health but that we provide them with skill sets training so they can integrate into the community in a meaningful manner and contribute. If they are injured veterans, we can help them. If they are families, or wives or husbands of veterans who need to look after them, we are there to support them. That is the key component of what we have done so far.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is to rise and speak to what is a really important issue to all Canadians.

We all value the great contributions the members of our Canadian Forces make day in and day out. There is so much that could be said on this particular issue. For me, personally, I would like to recognize the parliamentary secretary's speech which captured the essence of that caring attitude for our vets. She shared with the House the fact that she has two young sons serving in the Canadian Forces, and how that has some influence, both directly and indirectly, in terms of ensuring that we are going to be there for our retiring soldiers going forward, and making sure that we have a program that is ultimately second to no others.

I will say right at the beginning that there is always going to be room for improvement. I thought it would be nice to share with the House, and I made reference to it in a question earlier today, that I had the privilege of serving in the Canadian Forces for just over three years out in Cold Lake, Alberta. I was an air traffic control assistant. One of the things that I truly enjoyed was Remembrance Day, when there was an opportunity to meet with many of the vets, to march with them and to go to the Legion with them afterwards, and have discussions with them and share stories.

No matter which member we look at in the House, like the parliamentary secretary, myself, and others who have spoken, all of us can relate to the importance of our vets. I would like to think that all of us are concerned about the future and want to make sure that we deliver where we can.

I would like to refer to something the Prime Minister said back on November 11, 2017. He said:

We owe an immeasurable debt to our veterans, to the fallen, and to the families who love them. Just as our servicemen and women have taken care of us, we must also take care of them. It is our sacred duty as a country to be there for our heroes when they need us most.

The Prime Minister said that toward the end of 2017. The Prime Minister has been consistent ever since I have had the pleasure of knowing him on the opposition benches, and then when he became the Liberal leader. He has a strong, caring, passionate attitude towards our veterans.

It was a very big issue when we were in opposition. Close to 25% of the staff in that area were being laid off by the Harper government. I recall vividly the offices that the Harper Conservative government was closing, the general attitude of the minister who was responsible for veterans, and some of the things that took place at the veterans affairs committee. A general lack of respect was being shown to our veterans. It became a very passionate issue back then. No one should be surprised that the then leader of the Liberal Party took it on as an important issue going into an election.

What I respect is the fact that we talked about it prior to the election and during the election, but we also have responded to the concerns Canadians have raised. In government, we have done so much for our vets to date. I would like to highlight a few of those things.

Business of Supply

●(1530)

It did not take us long. In fact, in the very first budget, budget 2016, just months after the Prime Minister took office and the Liberals formed government, we saw over \$5.7 billion to provide veterans with more compensation and more choice in their financial future. Through budget 2016, we laid out the foundation for the pension for life. We did that by increasing income replacement from 75% to 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary. We increased the annual maximum pain and suffering compensation from \$310,000 to \$360,000.

Do members remember the hundreds of individuals who were laid off during the Harper era? We hired 460 new staff. Not only did we hire those new staff, but we also opened up the offices that the former government had closed down. I remember the reaction when the Conservatives closed down those offices. I stood in my place back then and asked questions about it. I tried to hold the government to account for the closure of those offices and the laying off of individuals. Those are some of the things that were presented in the 2016 budget, only months after we had taken office.

In budget 2017, we invested an additional \$624 million to further improve the health, well-being, and financial security of veterans and their families. We did that through things such as the new education benefit which provides flexibility and financial support so that each veteran can make the choice that best suits their needs and those of their families. That was up to \$40,000 for those with six years of service and \$80,000 for those with 12 years. There were significant things done in both the 2016 and 2017 budgets.

We hear a lot about the pension for life. The government has moved forward on the pension for life. If we take a look at that option that has been provided, we see a monthly tax-free payment for life to recognize pain and suffering. I emphasize that it is tax-free. We provide income replacement payable at 90%, as I indicated earlier, of a veteran's pre-release salary indexed annually and for life for those who actually need it.

I had the opportunity to serve, and I honestly believe that individuals who are called upon to serve in the Canadian Forces and those who bring themselves forward and have the desire to serve need to have peace of mind that if they are going to be put into situations in which their health and well-being could be compromised, there will be a solid commitment that the government will be there for them into the future.

As I indicated very clearly, the leader of the Liberal Party, before he became the Prime Minister, talked a great deal about the importance of vets. Then when the leader became the Prime Minister of our country, he started to work with the cabinet and caucus and presented through the Minister of Finance two consecutive budgets where hundreds of millions of dollars were added to that file. We have individuals who are committed to advance what is right in terms of servicing our veterans.

●(1535)

We will not take a backseat to anything that the former Conservative government has done, nor should we. I will compare our two years in office to the Conservatives' 10 years any day. We are moving forward. Our commitment is to continue looking at ways

in which we can still improve the system, but this is a government that is behind our vets.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for Winnipeg North for his service to Canada.

He is fond of quoting the Prime Minister, but there is a quote from a couple of weeks ago when the Prime Minister was in my hometown of Edmonton. He stated to a disabled veteran that the veterans are asking for more than Canadians can give. At the same time, the government spends \$8 million for an ice rink, writes off a loan to the dictatorship of Cuba for \$18 million, gives \$10 million to Omar Khadr, and is putting aside money for returning ISIS terrorists for poetry lessons when they return to Canada. How can the government say that it does not have enough to give to veterans and yet have all this money to waste in Canada for a hockey rink and the other things that I have mentioned?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we should think of the irony of that particular question. The Harper government spent in excess of three quarters of a billion dollars, \$750 million, on propaganda advertising. The Conservatives had no problem spending that kind of money. At the same time, they strove to balance the budget and did that at a substantial cost to our vets. That is how they tried to justify closing down the veterans offices. That is how they justified not giving the moneys that were necessary to support the programs that our vets have been calling for. Then the Conservatives wonder why there was that lack of respect toward the government of the day in regard to vets.

Anyone can point out many different aspects of a budget and say that money was spent here and money was spent there. When we are looking at the amount of money that a national government does spend, there is going to be all sorts of money spent in different areas. I could justify all of those expenses that the member across the way has put on the record.

●(1540)

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last June I had the pleasure of accompanying the veterans affairs committee on a trip to Washington to look at how the United States treats veterans versus how Canada treats veterans. There is a very alarming statistic. They now estimate that something like 70% of returning armed forces personnel suffer from PTSD. A couple of days ago, I met with Trevor Sanderson and Dick Groot, who are camping out here in Ottawa's winter at the veterans memorial. I had an interesting conversation with them about the impacts of PTSD and transition.

I would really like to know what the government intends to do to improve services, both around PTSD for our returning veterans and also around transition.

Business of Supply

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I made reference to the parades that I was involved in when I was in the service. To put it into a time perspective, that was in the early 1980s. When I met with World War II vets in particular, I would get a sense of the impacts of PTSD. I have sat in committee where there have been discussions about it. It is a serious issue. It is one of the reasons that we put in more money to deal with mental health for our veterans. Again, like everything else, there are always opportunities to look at ways in which we can improve the system. We understand the importance of PTSD and this is something which no doubt we will continue to work on in the years ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and all my other colleagues who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces.

I think it is fair to say that there is a feeling of abandonment among our veterans that comes from not having the type of assistance from society and from the government that the lifetime pension represents.

Could my colleague explain why this lifetime pension option is so appealing to a veteran?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one of the things it demonstrates is that the government genuinely does care. One of the things I really respect, whether it is the Minister of Finance, Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Prime Minister himself, cabinet, indeed, all of us, is that we recognize just how important that option of pension for life is to our veterans. Within two years of being in government, we were able to deal with that issue. Therefore, if there is a sense of hope out there, then we are on the right track.

If there was a message I would want to communicate to veterans and Canadians as a whole, it is that as a government we are doing the best we can at moving forward. There are always going to be ideas which we will continue to take in. We will be listening to Canadians, just like the Prime Minister did when he took his tours across the country, and listened to Canadians through town halls and so forth.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my friend, the member for Yorkton—Melville.

This is an important debate today. First and foremost, let us honour our veterans, those who have gone out there and served, who fought, and made sure we are safe here at home. They have made major sacrifices on behalf of themselves and their families. It is important that not only do we honour and respect them but that we share the covenant and sacred obligation to support them.

As Conservatives we believe in that, to the letter, unlike the government. The reason we are having this debate today is because of some very insensitive comments made by the Prime Minister in a town hall just recently. However, this started before the Prime Minister was in Edmonton, and said there was no more to give.

This started when the Prime Minister broke his promise that he would no longer force veterans to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned.

When we look at the promise that was made back on August 24, 2015, which is in the motion that we are debating here today, and look at what the government did, not only by taking the Equitas group of veterans back to court, we have to look at the arguments it made.

In paragraph 99 of the submission, the government says to the defendants, meaning Equitas, the veterans, that there is no written, defined, or articulated social covenant or social contract between members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the government, and people of Canada, which has those attributes.

Despite the rhetoric that has been coming from the Liberals, their argument has been that there is no social contract or social covenant. They actually say it again, that at no time in Canada's history has any alleged social contract or social covenant had the attributes pleaded by the plaintiffs, the veterans, been given effect in any statute, regulation, or as a constitutional principle, written or unwritten.

Again, the Liberals are arguing that no principles exist, there is no certainty, there is no clarity, and that the Government of Canada has no obligation to our veterans. That is really disappointing.

I have met with some people of the Equitas lawsuit, including Aaron Bedard who does Veteran Guerrilla Radio on Facebook. These are veterans who have been fighting the government. These are veterans we had a handshake agreement with under the former minister of veterans affairs, the member of Parliament for Durham, our friend and colleague.

We were moving forward as a government to fix that. The Prime Minister said quite clearly in the election campaign that veterans would not have to fight the government in court, but then Liberals turned around and betrayed veterans who went out and campaigned for them, working on their behalf. The Liberals betrayed them by not honouring that promise.

It was a broken Liberal promise, and veterans are back in court.

The next broken promise was when the Liberals said that veterans were going to have a lifetime pension. The member for Winnipeg North was just saying that Liberals gave them a lifetime pension. He is not listening to what veterans are actually saying, because veterans feel betrayed by the Liberal program that was announced.

Don Sorochan, lead counsel for the Equitas Society, said:

The position taken by the government was astonishing. For them to stand up and say we don't have any special obligation to veterans was completely contrary to everything they had been saying in Parliament, on the election campaign.

Mark Campbell, who is part of the Equitas group, said:

The new pension for life is nothing more than a shell game.

Sean Bruyca, who is a veteran and veterans advocate, said on CBC:

Business of Supply

Instead, the government merely resurrected ghosts of Christmases past with a hodgepodge of benefits that amount to recycled, remodeled, and repackaged programs that already exist.

There is no new money here, and any new money that the Liberals are talking about is actually down the road, past 2019, past the next federal election. There is actually no cash in the bank for veterans today. That is why veterans were on the front lawn protesting the government for betraying them and breaking the promise about not having to take them back to court, and betraying them and breaking the promise about having a true pension for life.

● (1545)

We just heard the member for Winnipeg North, and we hear the Minister of Veterans Affairs stand up in question period. The Minister of Veterans Affairs gets up here with his bravado, chest-thumping, and Liberal arrogance. I can tell members that veterans are insulted when he performs that way. It is not showing respect for our veterans. It is not honouring their service, and they feel they have been used as political pawns, as many members on the other side have with veterans when they stood behind the Prime Minister, and made promises for lifetime pensions, and when they made promises to actually keep veterans out of court. This is just completely disrespectful.

We can look at what the Prime Minister actually said in Edmonton when he was asked by a veteran, an amputee, why we were still fighting against certain veterans groups in court. The Prime Minister responded, "Because they're asking for more than we are able to give." Of course, there were boos and shouts. Even the Royal Canadian Legion, which usually does not get involved in political statements, said, "These sorts of words are extremely insensitive." Again, it is another betrayal that we have a Prime Minister who says that there is no money, and there is no sacred obligation in the court case.

However, there was an opportunity just last night when my colleague, the member for Barrie—Innisfil, came forward with Bill C-378, which would restore fairness principles and the sacred obligation, and to actually put that into statute law. Every single Liberal stood and voted against the recognition of the sacred obligation that the government has to our veterans. I am disgusted by that.

The Prime Minister says that it is more than we can give. I can tell members that the Liberals had no problem finding \$2.6 billion to help developing countries fight climate change. That money could have been used here to actually enhance spending for veterans. Just earlier this week, we learned that the Liberal government announced \$59.5 million to Burkina Faso for education efforts there. Why are we not spending that on our veterans? The Prime Minister says that it is more than we are able to give, I guess, to our veterans.

Our veterans are out protesting on the front lawn right next to a \$8.1 million temporary skating rink. That could have been used to support our veterans. There is the \$10.5 million payout to Omar Khadr, a convicted terrorist who was prepared to kill our veterans who were serving in Afghanistan. Let us not forget the reintegration of returning ISIS terrorists to Canada. There are federal dollars for that, and the \$500 million to the Chinese-Asia infrastructure bank.

This is not the only time the Liberals have taken our veterans to court. We just learned last week that they are also taking the Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans who have faced sexual harassment and sexual misconduct, while they served in the Canadian Armed Forces, to court from a class action lawsuit. In its argument, the Government of Canada said that it does not "owe a private law duty of care to individual members within the Canadian Armed Forces to provide a safe and harassment-free work environment, or to create policies to prevent sexual harassment or sexual assault."

The Prime Minister said he did not know about it, but that just shows he is incompetent. This actually undermines the Chief of the Defence Staff General Vance's Operation Honour where he wants to encourage victims of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct to come forward and report. Meanwhile, we have the government actually taking those veterans back to court with the class action lawsuit against the government.

It is amazing that all the litigation that the Government of Canada undertakes actually goes through a cabinet committee on litigation management, which is chaired by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and actually five out of seven members are women. The vice-chair is the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, who used to be the minister of status of women, and the Attorney General sits on that special cabinet committee on litigation management. Therefore, the Liberals knew about it, and let it go forward, which points out the hypocrisy they have. If it is not hypocritical, then they are incompetent for allowing this to go forward.

To summarize, when it comes down to restoring lifetime pensions as promised by the Prime Minister, he broke that promise. When it comes down to veterans being forced to take their government to court, the Prime Minister broke that promise. When it comes to making life easier for veterans, he broke that promise.

It is time for the Liberals to honour those election promises, and apologize for the way they are treating our veterans in Canada.

● (1550)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt the hon. member's sincerity and advocacy for Canada's military and veterans. However, I think Canadians watching us can be rightly cynical, because for 10 years what they heard about was offices closing, unspent budgets, and ministers literally fleeing widows of veterans down the hallways of Parliament. The record of the party across the aisle can leave people very cold. When they listen to this debate today, they can be rightly very cynical about what they are hearing from the party opposite, because the facts, the track record, and the reality of its governance, with free reign in the country, was a very lamentable and sad one for our veterans.

We made explicit promises, such as a pension for life, restoring budgets, and reopening offices, and we have met those commitments.

Business of Supply

I would like to ask my hon. friend if he has any regrets about those 10 years of broken promises to our veterans he helped preside over.

• (1555)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that I have met with every veteran and veterans group that has ever requested a meeting with me. I can assure him that I always fought, as every member of this caucus did, to provide the best services we could when we were the government.

We also did not make empty promises. We did not raise a bunch of false hopes, and we did not use veterans as pawns, as the Liberals did in the 2015 election campaign. That is what veterans are angry about. They want honesty and a government that will actually provide the services they require. As I pointed out, when the member for Durham was the minister of veterans affairs, he made a handshake deal not to take them back to court and to fix the system. I believe that would have happened if we had been able to form government.

We will continue to work with veterans groups and the Equitas Society to make sure that we can give them the support they need. They will have nothing but honesty and forthrightness when we deal with their issues.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if today's debate is about the promise the government has made to veterans or if it is about what has been done badly in the last 50 years by different governments? Are we looking for action for the future? Are we looking at the promises a government has made, or are we looking at everything that has gone badly in the last 50 years and not looking to the future for our veterans?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from the NDP, as a veteran herself, for her service to Canada.

First of all, this is about our veterans, how we move forward, and how we make sure we get this right. This should not be a partisan issue. Unfortunately, we have a government and a Prime Minister that have used them as pawns. They have made promises and have betrayed our veterans. We want to make sure that we point that out to Canadians so they understand that there has been a betrayal. There is no trust in the government to honour that sacred obligation we have as Canadians.

We had an opportunity last night to actually start moving ahead. We had an opportunity to pass Bill C-378, which would have put in statute law that sacred obligation, that social contract veterans are owed by the government and the people of Canada and what Canadians believe should be done. It was not just for the sake of veterans but because it is the right thing to do. It is time for us to move on this, and it is time for the government to finally get it right.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2011, when the Harper government won its majority mandate, VAC spending was \$3.6 billion a year. In 2015, when that government was replaced by a Liberal government, VAC spending started out at \$3.6 billion a year. Within two years, in the 2017-18 budget, VAC spending will be \$4.9 billion, an increase of almost 30%.

Why did the previous Harper government never find it in its budgets to increase spending for VAC?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her service to Canada as a lieutenant-colonel in the air force. I also want to say that I feel sorry for her, because she is one of the members who shilled for the Prime Minister about these supposed new funds. We all know the profile of these funds. A lot of them are amortized into the future and do not actually kick in and really start benefiting veterans until 2019. We know that most of the programs have remodelled, repackaged, and reprofiled those dollars.

On that basis, veterans have seen through the facade and are going to hold the government to account.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am standing today to speak to the Conservative opposition motion, which states:

That the House call on the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans for his insensitive comments at a recent town hall in Edmonton and show veterans the respect that they deserve by fulfilling his campaign promise to them, when he said on August 24, 2015, that "If I earn the right

Here I would have used the word "privilege".

to serve this country as your Prime Minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned".

Conservatives believe that Canada and its veterans have a covenant and that the government should be committed to providing the best services possible for veterans and their families, in recognition of their incredible service to Canada. The Prime Minister promised veterans during the election campaign that no veterans would be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned.

The Equitas team was called to Ottawa shortly after the Liberal election win, because it had supported the Prime Minister's very public commitments to it. Members of the team were greeted by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, expecting to work together to see the Liberal promise acted upon in a co-operative atmosphere, only to be left standing in the presence of the government's lawyer, who was there, once again, to engage them in the courts.

I fully understand why Canadian veterans came out in support of the Liberals in the election campaign. Equitas did its due diligence in asking each party what its position was on its demand for lifelong pensions, tax free, with no clawbacks and no adjustment without legislation in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister made a verbal promise, with a hand on his heart. Veteran to veteran, this would seem like a binding commitment, similar to the verbal commitment the Conservative minister at the time made to veterans that Conservatives would step back from the court proceedings.

Business of Supply

Clearly, there was no intention to follow through by the Liberals. They accomplished what they wanted: the support of veterans and Canadians who thought Liberals meant what they said.

The Prime Minister must do the honourable thing and apologize to veterans for breaking his promises to them. To veterans, honour and honesty are prerequisites to care, compassion, and respect. Perhaps this is why veterans are so disenchanted with the Prime Minister and the ministers to date at Veterans Affairs.

Justin Trudeau promised that veterans would never be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they earned. He has broken that promise. He promised Canadians that if they voted for him, he would re-establish lifelong pensions for injured veterans. He has broken that promise. It is the Prime Minister's responsibility to fulfill the promises he made to veterans during the 2015 election.

As I speak to this motion today, I want to be clear that I am speaking on behalf of veterans and will be sharing many of their words on this issue, as it deeply concerns them. I am speaking on behalf of those I have come to know as witnesses at committee, many of whom have testified over and over again. In 10 years, after 14-plus reports on transition and 190 recommendations, again the mandate of the current veterans affairs committee has been to study the challenges to transition, not once but twice, with the second currently in process.

I am also speaking on behalf of those I met as I travelled across western Canada, from the island to Manitoba, at legion halls and round tables. I am speaking on behalf of so many who, although they cannot afford to do this, come to the Hill regularly to hold rallies, like the one today to bring attention to their disbelief in the arrogance of the Prime Minister's statement to an injured veteran in Edmonton confessing that they are asking for more than the government can give.

We can safely affirm that the Prime Minister's priorities for spending Canadian taxpayers' hard-earned money were never focused on Canadians and veterans but only on his own global ambitions.

David Bona, a long-serving veteran of the Canadian Airborne, who served in Somalia, who has suffered physical, mental, and emotional scars from his service, is a very strong advocate challenging the government on behalf of his fellow servicemen and women, veterans, and their families, and I am honoured to call him my friend.

● (1600)

Yesterday, he wrote to me saying, "When I first heard that statement, I just could not believe he said that. I was in complete disbelief. By that simple statement, Mr. Trudeau has shown how little he values the sacrifice, the emotional and physical price".

● (1605)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I did not interrupt the first time. However, on the second occasion, this is just a reminder to switch gears, when those names appear, to either the title of the hon. member or to his or her riding name.

Just for the purpose of the citation, the member did mention that it was included in a quote. However, even when a member's name is incorporated in a quotation, the member can certainly use the quotation but must make a change with respect to that. One cannot do indirectly what we are prohibited from doing directly. That is just a reminder to the hon. member.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. Two years in, and I am still learning.

Gary Westholm, who is a friend and member advocating for practical changes to the JPSU on behalf of our serving members and veterans who have fallen at home as a result of suicide, had this to say. "One has to wonder, then, how the previous pension system was affordable for the tens of thousands of injured from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, the October Crisis, countless United Nations deployments, through depressions, financial collapse, global insecurity, and half the Afghanistan War. It was also affordable on the Liberal election trail of 2015, but somehow now, in 2018, at a time when the people of Canada are benefiting from the sacrifices of their military families in other areas, the return to the previous system becomes something too costly to consider. Yes, there was something recently tabled that may benefit a very small group of veterans. Even the ombudsmen's offices have not been given the details, but that comes across as an attempt to claim that something was done to relieve the government of its real responsibilities. I suggest the pension system has been deemed too costly to consider by the government if it takes monies away from projects they now deem as more important than veterans."

Speaking to Marc-André Cossette at *CBC News*, Dick Groot, a veteran, said, "We want to go back to being human."

Trevor Sanderson said, "We're not asking for a lot. We're only asking to feel normal again."

Brock Blaszczyk, speaking to *Global News*, served in Afghanistan for less than a year when he was injured in an explosion and lost his leg. He said:

Enough is enough.... it's not all fine and dandy in the veterans world like it's made out to be....

Even though I'm a hundred per cent disabled, according to Veterans Affairs Canada's standards, I don't qualify [for the new Pensions for life benefit] because I work.... I have a...job.... because of my own determination.... I have to support my family.... I can't live off of nothing.

Gary Walbourne, the Canadian Forces ombudsman, has said, "We do not need another study into transition."

Business of Supply

Aaron Bedard, a disabled Afghanistan veteran, of Veteran Guerrilla Radio, said in response to watching the vote last night and the defeat of the member for Barrie—Innisfil's bill, said, "I watched this clean through, watching a government and veterans within that government defeat a bill to show the government genuinely cares about veterans. Each and every one of those veterans in that party stood up to say nay and defeat this bill. It's enough to make me want to just burst into flames. It's one of those moments where I want to throw my medals in the garbage. [The Minister of Veterans Affairs] did it with a smile."

Dwight McMahon said, "People, the thing is that [the Prime Minister] thinks our veterans are asking for more than what his government can give. The real problem is Canadians are asking [the Prime Minister] to properly run Canada, which is more than he can give.... There is a lot more to being a Prime Minister than taking selfies and throwing money around and trying to look good on the world stage."

Veterans are feeling winded, dismayed, hurt, angry, devalued, misunderstood, and emotionally and spiritually exhausted by the fight they now find themselves in. Why? It is because the Prime Minister has broken his promise that veterans would never be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned. The Prime Minister broke his promise that if veterans voted for him, he would re-establish lifelong pensions for injured veterans.

I know that the Prime Minister and all the Liberals on the other side of the aisle are seeing and feeling a storm brewing. Perhaps it is too late for an apology.

•(1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the member on a number of counts. Today, I listened to many Conservatives and it is virtually the same lines. They bring up different quotes from some veterans and I appreciate listening to them, but I reflect on the years I was in opposition.

If I contrast the six years in which I was in opposition when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, it is night and day. There were cuts during the Harper regime. Here we have seen literally hundreds of millions of dollars added. We have seen the reopening of offices, the hiring of hundreds of individuals, the pension for life option. Those were all realized within two years. In 10 years, the Conservative government could not do that.

We want to be as apolitical as we can. I like to think that all of us care deeply and are passionate about our veterans, but surely the Conservative Party would recognize it is indisputable that the level of increase is real and tangible. It is in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, the government continues to make promise after promise, because it is putting money toward our veterans but everything is off in the future. Even on their suggestion as to what would be a lifelong pension, our veterans have come out very strongly to say the Liberals have broken the promise that the Prime Minister made during the election. With his hand on

his heart, he said what he would do for those individuals, for Equitas, when they came forward and supported him in the election.

The Prime Minister has broken his promises. He is the one who has to be held to account by our veterans and they will be doing that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. We have to appreciate the intellectual honesty behind her claim that veterans deserve our admiration and congratulations, and that we must address their needs in such a situation. They have made the greatest sacrifice, and the least their country can do is give them what they are owed. I truly admire what my hon. colleague said.

However, I wonder whether she is aware that Mr. Blaszczyk's situation can be traced back to the Conservative government. Yes, he may be utterly disappointed with a broken promise. However, this can be traced back to quite some time before the election campaign. It can be traced back to the Conservative government, and the blame lies at her party's doorstep. The issue of compensation goes back to the Conservative government.

Was my colleague aware of that?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, yes, I was certainly aware of the issues with Equitas when our government was in power. I am very proud of the work that our minister did in the last few months before the election was called, when he was able to work with them and put that whole situation into abeyance until the election was completed.

It is at that point that Equitas came forward to every party and asked them what their response would be to them. We continued to be honest with them in that circumstance and did not make lofty promises that were never intended to be filled by a government that took advantage of them. That is the issue today and that is the issue that is boiling within the veterans community.

•(1615)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would say at the outset I am splitting my time with the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

What I cannot say at the outset is the traditional phrase that I am pleased to be rising to speak to this motion, because I am not. It is never a good day when we have to rise in the House and speak to a motion on the failures of our government toward Canadian veterans.

Frankly, I am not thrilled to join the debate today, which has largely been an exercise in finger-pointing between the Conservatives and the Liberals about who has been the bigger failure to our veterans.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The audio is not working.

The audio is working now. The hon. member can pick up where he left off, and we will not take any time away from him.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly when things cut out, but I will say again that it is not particularly pleasing to have to join a finger-pointing debate about whether the Liberals or the Conservatives have been the bigger failure to our veterans.

Business of Supply

However, it was a sad moment for Canada when our Prime Minister responded to a veteran at the town hall in Edmonton with what he called an honest answer, when he said, “Why are we still fighting certain veterans groups in court? Because they are asking for more than we are able to give right now.” Apart from the tone deafness of his response to a veteran who was disabled and clearly sacrificed so much for his country, it evades the real question here. It is not a question of how much we can afford. It is a question of our priorities as a country. When we hear the Prime Minister say, “We can’t afford this”, what he is really saying is “This is not important to me. Something else is more important.” That was an embarrassing moment, not just for the Prime Minister but for the entire country.

Let us look at the Liberal priorities. I want to start off with a look at two competing broken promises. It is not hard to find broken promises, so I am just going to focus on two. I would like to compare the promise to restore veterans benefits to those who are disabled and saying that veterans will never have to “fight the government” to get something that they’ve already earned, on the one hand, with the government’s promise to do away with the stock option loophole for wealthy Canadians on the other.

The stock option deduction is beyond understanding for most people. It is an obscure tax benefit for rich Canadians, which costs us about \$500 million per year. These executives take stock in lieu of pay, and therefore, escape taxation on a large portion of their income. In fact, the stock option loophole seems to make up about 25% of the obscene incomes of top CEOs in Canada, and 92% of the benefits of this go to the top 10% of income earners.

What does this have to do with veterans? Here is a promise the Prime Minister broke. He decided we could clearly afford to continue giving \$500 million a year to the richest 10% of Canadians, but he could not afford to keep his promise to veterans. That is what I mean when I talk about priorities.

In the 2015 campaign, the Liberals clearly promised to start taxing those stock options that exceeded \$100,000. They have not even done that. What we in the New Democratic Party have said is that this is a stock option that was created for start-up companies, and that is not what it is being used for now, so let us eliminate this tax loophole for all those other CEOs who are using it and limit it to only those start-up companies that it was supposed to benefit in the beginning. That would give us probably close to \$500 million a year, which we could invest in veterans’ benefits.

The Liberal list of things they are giving us in this debate are things they are promising to do, but still have not done. The lifetime pensions they are talking about clearly do not restore benefits to the levels that existed before they were cut by the Conservatives, but also they do not exist yet. They are still a future promise. We still have to wait before they are going to get around to doing these pensions.

Despite the finger-pointing at previous Conservative governments, even if much of it is richly deserved, it is clear the government is not going to keep its own promises to veterans, and that is what it needs to focus on. The Liberals should stop focusing on what the Conservatives did or did not do, and focus on what they are not doing now for veterans. They still are, as a government, fighting disabled veterans in court. Their pension promise will be three years

late, and it will not restore benefits to the previous levels. It is clearly going to be a matter of very complex examples, which they are giving us here, of what the maximum benefits might be, but lesser benefits to actual disabled veterans than they were promised by the Liberals when they were running for office.

There are a lot of things we could talk about other than the specific promise to disabled veterans, because the other thing the Prime Minister indicated before he was Prime Minister was that he believed there was a sacred obligation to those who served, to make sure we provide the supports they need after they have finished their service.

• (1620)

I want to talk about two things that the government has not talked about specifically but are equally important in my riding. They are part of that implied promise to those who serve that we have an obligation to them when they get home. These two things are the question of veterans’ homelessness and the question of mental health supports within the Canadian Forces and for Canadian veterans.

When it comes to homeless veterans, what do we know? The numbers are not exactly clear. Veterans Affairs Canada admits it has 785 homeless veterans in its database. Past studies have suggested that the true figure is closer to 3,000. Why is that 3,000 figure so much higher? I believe and I know in my riding it is because many veterans are reluctant to admit their situation is so dire.

It is clear in my riding that in addition to those who are visible on the streets of greater Victoria and in addition to those who are living in tents in the rural areas, there are many hundreds more veterans who are escaping homelessness only by sleeping on the couches and in the basements of their friends and relatives. This is something that we should all be ashamed of in this country.

When it comes to homeless veterans, what do we have from the Liberals? We just have platitudes about how the situation should not exist. Here is a news flash from those who work with veterans on the ground: homelessness does exist among those veterans. The Liberals have been promising a plan for over two years to deal with veterans’ homelessness. Here it is, a cold February, and veterans are camping out in protest here in Ottawa. Now the Liberals have said we can expect the plan in the fall of this year, which means we will probably go through another winter without any real action on veterans’ homelessness.

Business of Supply

The national homelessness strategy released by the Liberals last fall said things like “veteran homelessness is unacceptable” and “one homeless veteran is too many”. These are the kinds of platitudes that do nothing to address the real problems that veterans in my riding face every day and these sentiments will not get a single veteran housed.

In my riding, the only ones to act have been the veterans themselves. Members of the Langford Legion and other concerned community members set up a non-profit foundation in 2009, which runs programs for homeless veterans. They regularly provide supportive housing for up to a dozen or more homeless vets in my community. They have an eight-bed, free-standing complex called Cockrell House, which provides assisted living with the supports that they need. They have another two units at another location. One would say, 10 to 12, that is not very many, but that is 10 to 12 more than the government has supported in my riding. The number the government supports is zero.

The people who are financing this project, the BC/Yukon Legion Foundation, has bought the project and is paying the operating costs, and other volunteer groups like the Esquimalt Lions Club, one of the prominent builders in the community Russ Ridley, and the City of Colwood. While Cockrell House reports that Veterans Affairs Canada does co-operate well and helps them get veterans into programs, the amount of government funding that Cockrell House gets is zero. It does not get a dime. In my riding, it is the local veterans that are actually trying to take care of those who are in need and are homeless.

The second area I want to talk quickly about, where Liberals are failing to serve members of the Canadian Forces and veterans, is mental health services.

On February 21 at 7 p.m. at the Pro Patria Legion in Victoria, I will be attending the second Candlelight Ceremony in Memory of Soldiers of Suicide. This is a ceremony that will coincide with ceremonies in many ridings and communities across the country to raise awareness of PTSD and of those who have lost their personal battles with PTSD and to try to address the isolation and the loneliness and the stigma that the families feel after those suicides.

Hopefully these events will help lift the veil of silence on PTSD-related suicides. Once again, we thank volunteers Megan Willet Hiltz and Jim MacMillan-Murphy for organizing this event. I encourage people in greater Victoria to attend this event and others to attend similar events across the country.

When it comes to the Canadian Forces and our veterans, we must make sure that our troops have the equipment, training, and support they need to do the difficult and dangerous work we ask them to do each and every day on our behalf.

• (1625)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member has articulated his concerns, and I appreciate that.

Our government has invested \$10 billion in two years. How did we invest those dollars? We invested them after consultation with veterans and their families. We invested in things like increasing compensation for pain and suffering, increasing income replacement,

reopening offices, hiring 460 staff, providing education benefits, and supporting family and caregivers. We did not just come up with those things. We came up with them after consulting with veterans and their families. That is \$10 billion in two years.

The member also mention mental health, and we are all concerned about that. We invested \$17.5 million over four years to establish centres of excellence on post-traumatic stress disorder.

Does the member not acknowledge the significant investment this government has made and the importance of consultation with veterans in making those investments?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member's questions is an example of what we are dealing with today. This is what the government has decided that it can afford, and this is exactly the answer the Prime Minister gave to veterans, that so many in my riding find unacceptable.

Yes, the government has started to restore some of the things that were cut away, but to say that this is enough, to say that the Liberals have kept their promises, and to say that the fundamental obligations that exist are there is hard for veterans in my riding to accept. They still see that they have to fight the government in court. They still see the big gaps on homelessness and mental health that exist in my riding.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I hear from my constituents, in response to the Prime Minister saying that veterans are asking for more than the government can give them, is that it does not reflect at all their own values. I am confident this is the same with my colleague's constituents.

My constituents see the Liberals spending billions of dollars in other countries, millions of dollars on reintegrating terrorists, and millions of dollars on a skating rink. It is not at all the case that they believe the government does not have enough to reflect their level of concern, of compassion and respect for the service of all of our veterans. I agree with our colleague that this is a matter of priorities.

In 2015, all members unanimously supported the concepts of fairness, dignity and respectful treatment of veterans through the sacred covenant by making that law. However, the other night the NDP voted with us to support making that ethos law. Meanwhile, every Liberal member voted against it. Maybe the member will expand on his comments about the difference between what the Liberals say and what they do, and touch again on this issue of priorities.

Business of Supply

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her advocacy in the House for veterans. I appreciate the work she has done. She has invited me to join the finger pointing and I will not do that.

The question for veterans is this. They are used to serving their country and it is very hard for them to have to stand up in public and ask for what they have already earned. It is not something they want to do. Therefore, when the government gives me a list of things it has done and implies that they are acceptable to veterans, we have to remind people that veterans are not used to saying, "I'm not being treated fairly." They are used to serving their country and doing it without complaint. It is up to the rest of us to ensure we keep our obligations to those who have served.

• (1630)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the veterans and the men and women who are currently active in the Canadian Armed Forces for their contribution.

I had the honour of meeting a veteran from the Winnipeg area, Trevor Sanderson. He is in Ottawa today. Along the lines that my colleague was suggesting, he was trying to get beyond the partisan debate and suggest some real concrete solutions. Veterans are protesting here today. They are quite clear that notwithstanding some of the things the government is doing, they are clearly not satisfied. He was talking about getting veterans and front-line veterans affairs workers together to look at the needs and how to address them.

What we heard in the House today in contrast is a very partisan debate of two governments, one that started a lawsuit against veterans and one that is continuing it. How do we get past that and get down to the kinds of things that Trevor Sanderson was talking about today?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member reinforces the point I was trying to make. Whatever Conservatives did in the past and whatever the Liberals have failed to do now, veterans are asking us to look at the real problems they are facing in communities all across our country. They want us to get busy on working to solve those problems with them and to stop fighting them, to stop opposing them, and to stop accusing them of asking for too much.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Shepard, Taxation; the hon. member for Edmonton West, Taxation; the hon. member for Bow River, Health.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on this subject.

I had the opportunity to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces from 2002 to 2006. I then chose to serve my country in another way by becoming a member of Parliament, but I will always remember what I did. I will also remember the friends I made, the conversations we had, and their daily struggles. Even though I am now an MP, I am still close to them because the experience we shared in the armed forces is hard to explain to people who have not gone through it. If we take the time to listen to veterans and understand their reality, we can put forward measures that really work for them.

I would like to talk about some of the symbols of the armed forces because we sometimes forget what they signify. One of the symbols people tend to associate with the military is identification tags. Few people really know what they mean. Soldiers' names and serial numbers are stamped on dog tags because there is a risk they could die in an explosion or under other circumstances in which a plastic identification card would be destroyed.

The person's religion is also stamped on the tag because things can happen very fast and religious rites sometimes have to be administered before death. If a soldier cannot tell anyone what faith they belong to, that information can be found on the tag. Finally, the tag includes the person's blood type because there is not always time to test for that when an urgent transfusion is needed.

Mr. Speaker, do you know of many jobs where the worker needs to wear a metal tag so they can be identified in case they die in an explosion, since a plastic ID card would be destroyed?

Are there any other jobs where the worker's blood type has to be engraved on their identification tag in case they are seriously injured and need a blood transfusion in a combat situation?

Are there any other jobs where the worker's religious affiliation has to be engraved on their identification tag so their wishes can be honoured in case they die?

I do not know of any other job where people voluntarily expose themselves to so many dangers. Death is not the only danger. There is also the possibility of losing a part of themselves. When a soldier goes out on the battlefield, they know that they will never be the same. They know that what they are going to experience and learn will change them for life. When they joined the forces, some people were well aware that their mental health could be affected. However, they believed that it was important to have people doing this job. It takes people who are capable of handling what comes with the job. Not everyone can handle it, but it is absolutely essential to have people who are prepared to defend themselves.

If these people had not fought, we would not have the society and the rights we have today, and we would not have been protected as we were. I could not have raised my children the way I have been doing. I might not even have been born. Given how much our soldiers are affected, we have no choice but to recognize the value of what they do for our society.

The Prime Minister made a clear, specific promise that members of the military would no longer have to fight the government. The Prime Minister himself said this. It was in the Liberals' election platform; they said it themselves. However, now they are telling veterans that they are asking for more than we can give them. This response is completely unacceptable.

• (1635)

Veterans have given more than they felt capable of giving. Some of them never thought they were capable of doing certain things and yet they managed to do them for this country. They fought for freedom. They gave more than they were able to give, and the government is refusing to give them what they deserve.

Business of Supply

I have seen veterans walking around with binders filled to the brim with such papers as military records and correspondence. Is it normal for veterans to need four or five two-inch binders to carry their military records just to get the compensation they are entitled to? These people learned how to fight. I am sure that most of them, even if they left the armed forces 20 years ago, would still be able to disassemble and reassemble a weapon, blindfolded, in less than five minutes. However, they are now being told to do something they have never been trained for. They are being told that they are going to fight the government, and that they will go crazy trying to figure out how we can fail so badly at taking care of people. They will be left to wait in limbo for months before they know what is going on, and they will not be able to move forward.

It is important to understand that these people have been trained to react to situations quickly and adapt plans and strategies accordingly. Now they are being forced to wait for months before finding out what is going to happen. During that time, they cannot make a plan. Waiting alone is intolerable, especially for people who are used to taking action, reacting to situations, and devising alternate strategies. They are being subjected to endless delays.

We keep hearing about ridiculous situations. For example, a veteran whose leg was amputated was asked if he is still injured. Legs do not grow back. Is there any need to ask a veteran with an amputated limb to confirm that the limb is still amputated because it has been three years since anyone checked in? This kind of thing happens all the time, and it is ridiculous. We need to put an end to this excessive red tape. We need a more human approach at Veterans Affairs.

The government's treatment of veterans is not about funding; it is about behaviour. When the government talks about how much money was invested in a given year, it is not really talking about actions taken or how veterans are being treated. When the government gets stuck on numbers, does that do anything to help veterans? No. When people's files are thousands of pages thick and they are about to lose their homes and Veterans Affairs is making them wait, that is not respectful.

We should take a different approach from the very beginning and ask veterans what we can do to help them. We need to be much more proactive and show them the same respect they showed when they were asked to go into battle and they agreed, asking merely what they could do to help their country and promising to do their very best. The government, meanwhile, is doing the exact opposite. I am outraged that Veterans Affairs is questioning the connection between a back injury suffered by a soldier with 30 years of experience in the infantry and military service. That individual spent most of his life, 30 years, walking around with 80 pounds of equipment on his back, not counting his weapons and ammunition, and then the department has the nerve to claim that his injury has nothing to do with his military service. What is wrong with this picture?

We need to refocus the debate. The Prime Minister made some promises and he has an obligation to keep them. His promises are not just about the numbers. This is about the government's attitude towards veterans.

• (1640)

We need to examine how we act towards veterans, how we treat them, and how we respect them by addressing their problems. Once we change that, we can really move things forward for our veterans.

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the importance of having respect. I came to understand that even more when I participated with the military in the Nijmegen march about the respect they received and the respect they showed to others.

When someone looks a person in the eye and says that he is going to fix the person's problems, makes a promise, and then comes to Ottawa and breaks that promise knowing full well he never intended to keep that promise, is that showing respect? How do the veterans and the members of the military feel when they see this happening to them in this instance?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, one is not being respectful if one breaks one's promises. If the Prime Minister did not intend to do what he said he was going to do, then he should simply not have said it. It is simple. He simply should not have looked people in the eye and lied as he promised to do something that he was not going to do. He is not even trying right now. That is the problem. It is disrespectful. If the Liberals are not going to do what they said they were going to, then they simply should not have said they would do it in the first place. That way they would not create false expectations.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to pick up on the member's points, obviously I disagree with much of what was said. The member talks about respect. Was it respect when the Conservatives closed down those offices? We reopened those offices. That is a service. That is face-to-face contact. Money does matter, and this government has provided additional hundreds of millions of dollars in further compensation.

Members of the NDP like to click their feet together, wave a wand, and think everything can be resolved just like that. Life does not work that way. NDP governments have experienced that firsthand. At the end of the day, I think the NDP nationally promised under half a billion dollars. We have committed over \$10 billion. We have delivered on services and the financial resources to make a difference.

To try to imply that the Prime Minister does not care about our vets is just wrong. We have a Prime Minister and a government that have the backs of our vets.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that I never served with the member opposite.

Business of Supply

I am not the one who said those things. It was the Prime Minister. He is the one who said that veterans were asking for more than the government could give. Those are his words. He said them on camera.

Why can I not say that he disrespected veterans, when he was caught on video doing so at a town hall? I did not force him to say that. The Prime Minister said it. He has to take responsibility for what he said, which was not respectful to veterans.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague. I really enjoyed her speech, particularly when she spoke about respect.

It is too bad that the members opposite do not understand that respect does not necessarily involve money. It comes from the heart. It does not do any good to say that the Conservatives did not do this or that. We are not the ones who said those things. It was the Prime Minister.

The member spoke earlier about how she served in the military from 2002 to 2006. Can she tell me how things were at that time and how the governments treated soldiers?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, that has nothing to do with the issue at hand, but since the hon. member asked, I will tell her.

I served from 2002 to 2006. It was toward the end of the Liberal's run after a decade of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin. I can say that there was massive disinvestment in the armed forces. We regularly ran into problems such as finding boots in the right size.

Training was done with pathetic equipment. It was totally ridiculous. Training was not adapted to the new combat reality.

I am listening to the Liberal members talking, but I experienced the end of the Liberal reign when they were rather callous about the equipment and appropriate training.

In my opinion, mistakes were made in the funding of our armed forces in the past. We must move forward. I cannot say who in particular made the most mistakes.

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brandon—Souris.

I rise today to speak to the motion of the hon. member for Brantford—Brant. This is an important issue for me personally and for my riding of Sturgeon River—Parkland. My constituency has one of Canada's largest military installations at the Edmonton Garrison and the community surrounding the garrison are the homes of many who serve and have served Canada. In communities like Morinville, Bon Accord, and Gibbons, one is likely to run into a member of the Canadian Armed Forces at the local Tim Hortons and it is not surprising to see a military vehicle or tank driving down our streets. I am proud to represent a military community full of military families.

Many young men and women join the Canadian Forces because they want to be part of something greater than themselves. They want to be part of an institution that has kept Canada and Canadians

safe for generations. They want to be part of an institution that is founded on the principles of duty, honour, integrity, and discipline. These are values that all members of the Canadian Forces live by. They are values that they hold dear beyond their term of service to this country. These are values that we, as politicians, should remember when we make promises and when we are called upon to fulfill them.

Much can be said about the covenant we hold with veterans. It began in the Great War when tens of thousands of Canadians died in the trenches of Belgium and France. Confronted with the prospect of declining manpower in a war where the fate of many great and ancient nations was held in the balance, Canada faced a crisis and the government of Sir Robert Borden made a difficult choice to introduce conscription. It was a necessary move that threatened to split our country in two. Remarkably, Conservatives and many Liberals joined together in support of conscription and in 1917, a Unionist government was elected with a smashing majority. This election was a pivotal moment because it affirmed that the government would take any action necessary to fulfill a covenant made to our men and women in uniform: that in war and peace, the government would always have their backs.

I bring up this history because the idea of a covenant was not one enshrined in legislation or our Constitution, but instead in a deeply held value, a value I mentioned previously, that being honour. It was so unthinkable of our leaders that they would betray our veterans that they did not see the necessity to enshrine that covenant in our laws.

To a member of the Canadian Forces, honour is the highest value. I remember while training once, a master corporal told me that if I lawfully ordered him to take an enemy position, even though that order could lead to his certain death, he would carry out that order. That is what honour and duty mean. That responsibility weighs on me tremendously, because as legislators, we have the political authority to order our men and women in uniform to go to war, in some cases to their almost certain death. That is why I am disappointed with the Liberal government. I am disappointed with the Prime Minister, who does not seem to understand the gravity of his responsibility and obligation to our men and women in uniform.

At a recent town hall near my home in Edmonton, the Prime Minister was asked a question by one who offered his life to this nation in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister was asked why he had broken his promise to veterans. This was a veteran who we later learned had lost one leg to an improvised explosive device and had lost 80% of the use of his other leg. The Prime Minister's response was that veterans "are asking for more than we are able to give right now". It was a shameful statement made by the Prime Minister, a statement that no previous prime minister would ever dare to make. His response exposes a deep disrespect for our veterans.

Is the Prime Minister implying that our veterans are being greedy, that they ask for too much because they are being unreasonable? I cannot imagine those venerable wartime leaders, such as Borden and King, passing through the packed hospital wards of those rendered disabled, maimed, and permanently scarred from war and telling them that they were asking for more than the government could give.

Business of Supply

●(1650)

The fact is that successive Canadian governments have asked our soldiers and their families for all that they can give: their lives and the lives of their loved ones. They have been asked, and they have given in full measure with their blood, their sweat, their toil, and their tears. For our Prime Minister to say that veterans “are asking for more than we can give right now” is an insult. It is an abdication of the responsibility and obligation that he holds as Prime Minister.

In our past, the economic devastation and sheer loss of life after two of the most intense wars in human history left their mark on Canada. Yet, despite the obstacles and challenges of the hundreds of thousands of physically and mentally wounded, not to mention those who lost their lives, through it all the government upheld its sacred obligation to veterans. It was not a bond maintained by legislation, but a bond maintained by honour and respect.

Today, we live in a free and secure society paid for by the blood of those who came before us. There are wars to be sure, but nothing on the scale of those fought in days past. With this age of relative peace, prosperity, and freedom, we have an economic dividend afforded to us by those who gave their lives.

Billions not spent on arms have been beaten into ploughshares, and the standing armies of millions of men in ages past have given way to small, professional armies that require a fraction of the resources to maintain. The fact is we must uphold our obligation to Canada's veterans, because we owe them for all we have.

When the Liberal government runs tens of billions of dollars in deficits, it does so because it has the choice to do so. In the tempestuous past, our ancestors had no choice when they went into deficit, because their only choices were victory or death. The peace paid for by those who served allows us the prosperity and flexibility to spend on making a better world and a better Canada. We have billions to spend on the Prime Minister's and the Liberal Party's pet projects, yet the Liberals choose not to fulfill this sacred covenant to our veterans. Rather than spending millions in court to settle with terrorists, perhaps the Prime Minister should spend millions to settle with our veterans and show them the respect they deserve.

The Prime Minister made an election promise that no veteran would be forced to fight the government for the support and compensation that the veterans earned, and he has broken that promise. Consequently, the Prime Minister has dishonoured himself, his office, and this country. It is not about the money. It is about respect and integrity. When the Prime Minister stood in Belleville and wrapped himself in the flag and made a promise to those veterans, those veterans placed their trust and faith in him that he would keep those promises, and he broke that faith.

This is why I am supporting this motion. The Prime Minister has compromised the trust that must exist between those who defend this country and those who are elected to lead this country. The Royal Canadian Legion has since called the Prime Minister's response at that town hall “extremely insensitive”. The Prime Minister must do the right thing and apologize to veterans for the disrespect and lack of integrity that he showed them.

I am reminded of the poem which is read every Remembrance Day:

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

It is not enough for the Prime Minister to stand every November 11 to recite this creed of our nation. It must be followed with action and integrity. I stand here today to hold the Prime Minister to account and demand that he uphold his sacred covenant with those who offer to give the ultimate sacrifice.

●(1655)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish the member had been present in the last term of Parliament when the Conservative Party fired Julian Fantino for running away from veterans. They fired him. We got him out of the House.

When we talk about empathy, members of the party opposite fake empathy every single moment they get the opportunity. They may have discovered listening now, but they did not listen in their 10 years in government. That is as crystal clear as any issue that has ever been presented on the floor of this Parliament.

Yesterday when it was announced that 52 families in my riding lost work when the NDP raised that question, members of that party opposite laughed and clapped their hands. That is the way they honour Canadians who are struggling. It is the same way they responded to veterans during their 10 years in government.

That party has lost its way in terms of its moral compass. While the member opposite spoke about the sacred obligation, I would remind him that it was his party that denied that a sacred obligation ever existed. The Conservatives are the ones who went to court. They are the ones who literally dragged veterans into court. They are the ones who failed on a whole host of promises. We have delivered on the lifelong pension.

I have a question for the member opposite. When Canadians are in need, why do members of that party laugh and clap their hands and ridicule people? Why has that party still failed to understand that empathy has to be real for it to be respected?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I do not need to be lectured about empathy for the members of our Canadian Forces and those veterans, because I have served in the Canadian Forces. I know about these veterans. I know what they go through. I have worked with them, and I have heard their perspective.

I am listening, and this party is listening. I am not going to make excuses for the past, but I know that we can do better. I know that the current government can do better. That is why I am holding it to account, because I know the government can do better, and it needs to do better.

Business of Supply

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his service to our country. I am sure that my hon. colleague will be sharing this speech with his constituents on social media. I am sure that he is going to get a lot of support for his remarks. I wonder if he would also be willing to share in the note section, under the speech that he will share with his constituents, the fact that his former government, the party that he is currently representing, cut services to veterans for 10 years, and closed down nine offices that supported veterans over a 10-year period of time.

Will he share that information with them? Will he also share with his constituents that we are investing \$10 billion of new money, that we put in place a pension for life option, that we are now repairing the damage that his former government did over the last 10 years? I challenge him. Will he share that information, and take responsibility for the situation that veterans across this country are currently in?

• (1700)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I would be more than happy to take responsibility for the veterans across this country. That is why we will be winning in 2019, because we are going to get to the bottom of this. We are not the party that reopened the Equitas lawsuit. The current government reopened the Equitas lawsuit after the Prime Minister promised those same veterans that they would never again have to go to court to fight for the benefits they deserve, and that is a broken promise. We are going to hold the Liberal Party and the government accountable for that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to acknowledge my colleague's good faith, especially since he himself served in the forces. I hear his truth and how he talks about this with as much objectivity and as little partisanship as possible. I would therefore ask him to explain to me why the government is determined to continue its proceedings in this case. I do not want to rub salt in the wounds, but he must know because it was his colleagues who began the proceedings.

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with Canada's former veterans affairs minister, and he was doing everything that he could to work with our veterans to settle this lawsuit. I have confidence that we would have done that had we been in government. It was not this party that reopened this court case after promising veterans that they would never again.

Sometimes governments just do not want to accept the fact they made a mistake, and when they made a promise that they could not deliver on. That party and government needs to be humble, and accept that they made a promise that they knew they could not keep. It is time for them to take ownership of that broken promise.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland for his excellent presentation today, and for his commitment to our country. It is my pleasure to speak to today's motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Brantford—Brant.

Words have consequences. The Prime Minister quickly found that out when he was booed by the audience at the Edmonton town hall. He not only insulted the veteran who asked the question, but he

disrespected all the veterans who are currently struggling to get the help they need from Veterans Affairs Canada.

In that quip, he admitted that he broke a key campaign promise to veterans. The reason why the Prime Minister's comments felt like a punch in the gut was because we see Liberals spending millions of taxpayers' money on ridiculous things, whether it be the moving expenses for political staff or \$200,000 on an illegal Caribbean getaway, and there are others. That is why this stings.

While I acknowledge the Liberals have increased the overall dollars spent through VAC, the Prime Minister's comment to that veteran was that veterans are "asking for more than we are able to give." That would make anyone's blood boil, especially as the Liberals have no problem spending taxpayers' money on frivolous things, as I have mentioned.

It is starting to feel like the movie, *Groundhog Day*, as once again the House is debating a motion about the Prime Minister's questionable conduct. While my Liberal friends from across the way have to defend their boss, our Conservative team is far more concerned about standing up for our bosses, the constituents in our ridings. We will not let the Liberals get away with their broken promises.

Each and every day, we will continue to shine a light on the transgressions of the government, and get it to honour the promises made to veterans. It is inconceivable how the Prime Minister has yet to make a meaningful apology to Canada's veterans. Sorry does seem to be the hardest word. I know every single MP in this Chamber wants to improve the services and programs that our veterans rely on.

I also know that, while some improvements have been made in the past 12 years, there is still much more left to do. When I was first elected in the fall of 2013 in a by-election, I made it quite clear that I was not elected to defend the status quo. I was not elected to make excuses, or shirk from my responsibilities as a member of Parliament to work to improve the quality of life of Westman veterans.

It was in that capacity that I worked with any member of this chamber who wanted to improve the new veterans charter and the levels of service delivery from VAC. To provide a few examples, in my constituency of Brandon—Souris, Service Canada started offering veterans affairs services at numerous rural offices, so veterans no longer had to drive to Brandon or CFB Shilo to drop off or pick up paperwork. We worked with the Legion and ANAF to make improvements to their buildings and improve accessibility.

Business of Supply

I advocated for increasing benefits for part-time reserve force veterans, and also to enhance the lifetime support for injured veterans and their families. I was proud to work with an impressive team that was pouring their heart and soul into this issue, and it must be said that it was a collective effort. My good friend, the hon. member for Durham, and previous veterans affairs minister was able to spearhead many of the changes I just spoke about.

The member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman was a regular visitor to my constituency in his capacity as the parliamentary secretary, and is passionate about improving mental health care services. Even the Hon. Laurie Hawn came to my constituency, and did a public meeting with our veterans community to incorporate their ideas into reforming the new veterans charter. There is no one who championed veterans issues more than Laurie, and even in retirement from the House of Commons, he remains a tireless advocate.

I can only imagine what Laurie had to say when he found out about the Prime Minister's flippant remarks at the Edmonton town hall.

• (1705)

The other member I would like to thank from our Conservative team is my friend from Barrie—Innisfil. Through his private member's bill, he would have enshrined into law the promise between Canada and our veterans. It would have made it crystal clear that VAC and the programs and services it offers, must treat veterans and their families with dignity, respect, and fairness. While my colleagues across the way voted against the legislation, I still have hope that we can implement the spirit of his legislation in everything that VAC does.

However, it is telling that we need to pass such legislation. It is an indication there is much more work to do. That is why today's debate is so important. We must not only hold the Prime Minister accountable for his offensive comments, the House is now seized with how the Liberals are not living up to their campaign commitments to Canada's veterans.

If we go to an independent website that is determining which Liberal promises have actually been implemented, we would discover that only three of the 15 have been achieved. If this were an exam, that would be considered a failure, except in this case, we are not talking about a test, we are talking about people's lives. We are talking about our brave men and women who were willing to put their lives on the line in defence of our great country. While I personally like the new Liberal Minister of Veterans Affairs, I would ask him to sit down with the Prime Minister and get to work on implementing the rest of their promises.

The Liberals are over half way through their term and, quite frankly, they have not done enough on veterans affairs issues. Just today, outside this chamber, there are veterans rallying against the government's broken promise on pensions. While I know the minister believes he has checked that box in his mandate letter, there are veterans from across the country who would fundamentally disagree. There are veterans who are calling the government's actions a betrayal. It is hard to disagree with them. The government's promises do not live up to its actions.

I know this conversation is a tough one to have. Many Liberals MPs are probably scratching their heads at how their Prime Minister could let down so many, and as quickly as he has done. It would be my sincere hope that by the end of today's debate, we will have reached consensus and work will begin immediately on implementing the Liberals' promises. The time for excuses is over. We must collectively demand better from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Canadians who are watching us today should be mad that the government has failed to live up to its word. They should be mad the Prime Minister, for whatever reason, cannot bring himself to give a meaningful apology. They should be mad the government is still talking about doing something, rather than just rolling up its sleeves and making veterans a priority.

I call on my Liberal colleagues to join us by voting in favour of the motion. I ask them to put aside their party stripes for this vote and support our veterans. They were willing to fight for our rights and freedoms in some of the most uninhabitable terrain one could possibly imagine. The least MPs could do is stand up for the motion, instead of sitting on their hands worrying about the consequences from their party bosses.

I believe our military veterans deserve the utmost respect for their service to our country, and the sacrifices many have made in that endeavour. It is imperative that our elected officials lead by example in demonstrating this respect.

• (1710)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Brandon—Souris for his really heartwarming remarks. I have not had a chance to work with him yet on the veterans file, so I want to thank him for his comments today.

He mentioned in his remarks that he was elected in the by-election in Brandon. We know that this veterans affairs office was closed under the previous government, then reopened in October 2016. Has he had a chance to visit the reopened veterans affairs office? Has he had a chance to talk to the folks and the veterans who are using that service, and does he feel that reopening that office was beneficial for the veterans that he serves?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed working with my colleague on electoral reform for a week while I was there as well. We have worked together on some issues.

The member's point is probably one that we have heard many times in the House. I lived through some of these kinds of things in the Manitoba NDP government when it would say that something had happened for 15 years when it never had.

The same services were available through our government before any of those changes were made, in Brandon particularly. I cannot speak for the other eight locations but in Brandon the same services were in the same building and provided by the same individual who had provided them before.

We are only 20 kilometres away from Shilo, which has a full service of support for veterans as well. There were all kinds of rumours about people having to go here and there so we opened up more of those rural offices so those veterans, some quite old, did not have to go to Brandon to get that service.

If my colleague were to check, she would find that the only thing that changed was the title on the door. It went from Veterans Affairs Canada to Services Canada. That is the case in all of the locations. If government members looked into that, they would see that in many cases those services were still being offered.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I fought to have the closed offices reopened.

I would like my colleague to tell me if reopening the offices is enough. We will still have a problem if there is no change in how veterans are treated and if they still have to deal with red tape.

Along with the reopening of offices should there be a change in approach? If there is no change, there will still be a problem.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question gives me an opportunity to answer the rest of the question my colleague from Quebec asked me earlier. Yes, I have been in the new office and, yes, I respect the work being done by the new people who have moved in to help the gentleman who was doing some of that work before.

To that very point, it is not just about the services. It is about the type of services being offered and how they are being offered. I take my colleague's point very well about how the services should be more humanitarian, if I can put it that way, with respect to the individual efforts of those veterans.

I feel my office is acting like a veterans affairs office some days as well. We get not only a lot of immigrants coming through on some of the other issues with respect to the committee I am on, but we get a lot of veterans looking for help, and we are glad to help them. The staff person I have is a reservist herself.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, February 26, at the expiry of the time provide for government orders.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, if you canvass the House, I suspect you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

Private Members' Business

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

HOMELESSNESS

The House resumed from November 24, 2017, consideration of the motion.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to be here in the House and, as the member for the riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, which takes in the two major cities of Halifax and Dartmouth, to have the opportunity to speak about what our government has done so far to help the middle class and those who want to join it.

Today, I have the opportunity to speak to Motion No. 147, moved by my colleague from Saskatoon West. I want to thank and congratulate her for her efforts, not just with respect to this motion, but also for the work she has done on this issue for many years.

The purpose of the motion before us is to appoint a special parliamentary committee to conduct consultations—which generally is a very good thing—and to develop an action plan. This committee would then report to the House, present the action plan, and obtain approval for it within one year. Thus, one year would pass by. I must say that the intent of this motion is very good. However, if I had to weigh in on it, I would say that it is two years too late. Our government has actually been working on this issue for two years and has put forward an affordable housing and homelessness strategy.

My colleague wants us to set up a new committee and hold another round of consultations, but we have done that work already. We have held many, many consultations and sought feedback from parliamentarians. An all-party standing committee examined the issue. We heard statements from many individuals and experts from across Canada. Consulting those organizations all over again when they have already spent a lot of time on this would not be very efficient.

Over the past two years, we have met with Canadians and stakeholders working to advance the national affordable housing strategy and the Canadian poverty reduction strategy or to transform our partners' anti-homelessness strategy. As I said, we could do more consultations, but if we ask the same people in the same communities the same questions, we will probably get the same answers.

We also need to think about how much time would be wasted. In the coming years, we can always improve our approach to accommodate new developments. In the meantime, those partners contributed, they gave their opinion, and now they want our government to act. We do not need more consultations. We need to take action. That is exactly what our government is doing. Our goal is to get the work under way by March 31, 2019, but if Motion No. 147 is adopted, we will have to hold more consultations, quite possibly putting that goal out of reach.

Private Members' Business

I urge the House to do the math. As I said, launching a new process, holding more consultations, striking a new committee, and consulting the same people to set up a program that we have already put in place and that will do a good job of meeting our clientele's needs would put the strategy we are hoping to announce soon way behind schedule.

• (1720)

In light of what I just said, our government will obviously not be able to support Motion No. 147.

Nevertheless, I would like to go into more detail on all of the work our government has done to put an end to homelessness.

First, I want to talk about how our government is supporting the national housing strategy by investing \$40 billion over the next 10 years. This investment will start on April 1, 2018.

This strategy will help re-establish our government's role as a housing leader and will meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

In 2016, we consulted Canadians, key stakeholders, and the provinces and territories to hear their thoughts and opinions on homelessness. These consultations produced recommendations that helped strengthen Canada's fight against homelessness.

More specifically, stakeholders advocated for renewing and expanding the homelessness partnering strategy. They also asked for more flexibility in the housing first approach. In addition, they pushed to include the right to housing in the national housing strategy.

As part of the national housing strategy and budget 2017, we announced a \$2.2-billion investment over 10 years to increase funding for the homelessness partnering strategy.

With these investments, communities are now better equipped to tackle homelessness and reach the goal of reducing chronic homelessness by 50% by 2027-28.

Our government also committed to consulting with stakeholders, the provinces, territories, and indigenous partners on how to best restructure the homelessness partnering strategy in order to more effectively reduce and prevent homelessness in Canada.

On top of that commitment, the government also created an advisory committee, chaired by our excellent Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister Responsible for Housing, and composed of experts, people who have been homeless themselves, and stakeholders in the field.

The committee held online consultations from July 17 to September 15, 2017. The committee also held a series of regional round tables across the country to gather additional information regarding service providers.

In short, the special parliamentary committee the motion calls for would only serve to duplicate a process that is already in place and appears to be very successful.

In closing, our government has done its homework on how to reduce and end homelessness in Canada, and will be ready to present its renewal plan in 2019.

I have not even had a chance to discuss our efforts to end poverty. I could go on for another 10 minutes, but I know that is impossible.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate the member for Saskatoon West on her work and her motion. More importantly, however, I want to congratulate her for the many years of hard work she has put in to advance this file.

• (1725)

[English]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my colleague for bringing this motion forward and for bringing this important topic to the attention of the House.

It is the unfortunate truth that homelessness is a major problem in Canada. Approximately 30,000 Canadians experience homelessness each night, and more than 200,000 each year. The face of homelessness is also changing, and some of our most vulnerable are being affected. The number of homeless seniors is increasing, with almost a quarter of the shelter population over the age of 50. In 2016, almost 3,000 veterans were in shelters, and approximately 30% of the shelter population was indigenous. This is unacceptable. Families can be hit especially hard. The average length of time that a family stays in a shelter is double that of an individual, and more women, families, and youth are homeless today than were in the past.

Despite the challenges, it is important to remember that homelessness does not have to be a fact of life. With some hard work, we can make a difference. This motion is a very good place to start. A special committee could provide us with the answers we need in order to take on the challenge of ending homelessness. My Conservative colleagues and I support compassionate, informed policy. We are the party of housing first and the homelessness partnering strategy. Sadly, the Liberal government has failed again and again to take adequate action to address affordable housing and homelessness. It is time for it to take these issues seriously.

There are local community groups on the ground doing incredible work, and we need to study their initiatives so we may learn from them. That is one of the really positive aspects about this issue. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. We can start from the programs that are already proven and expand from there.

My home province of Alberta has been a leader on this issue. Its housing first initiative is a great example of how to effectively tackle the homelessness crisis. This program is based on the idea that short-term emergency shelters are not a solution. It begins by providing individuals with permanent housing and then offers a wide variety of supports to help them get back on their feet. These supports could include anything from medical care to psychiatric help, case management, and social services. Once people have a roof over their heads, they can address the root causes of their homelessness and work toward creating an independent life for themselves.

Private Members' Business

The Government of Alberta estimates that it can cost more than \$100,000 each year in medical bills, as well as justice and social services, to support an individual who is chronically homeless, but it costs only \$35,000 a year to provide that same individual with housing and supports that will help him or her become independent. It is not only humane; it makes economic sense.

We have seen some great successes with the program. Medicine Hat's housing first program has succeeded in eliminating chronic homelessness. In practice, this means that while emergency shelters exist in the city, all individuals who end up in one are seen by a social worker within three days and have a permanent roof over their heads within 10 days. This is a major shift from the period before housing first, when some individuals would spend years in shelters.

Between the beginning of the program in 2009 and the end of 2016, Medicine Hat housed over 1,000 people. Perhaps the most exciting result is that 80% of those individuals have successfully exited the program and are now independent, while the city has actually seen a reduction in costs associated with health, crime, and child welfare.

This is just one of the many great local initiatives that a committee on homelessness could study and evaluate. My Conservative colleagues and I believe in the work that our local non-profits, social services, and businesses are already doing. The government should partner with these organizations, which already have the skills and the knowledge to tackle this issue.

Society has come to accept homelessness as an inevitable fact of life. Emergency shelters do valuable work, but they are ultimately a band-aid solution.

• (1730)

When we see that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are affected by this issue and that the number of women, youth, and families experiencing homelessness is increasing, it is clear we should take action. The Liberal government continues to lag on this critical issue, so Parliament will have to step in to address it.

I support the motion because a committee study could form an important basis for a national strategy to end homelessness. Let us work together toward a future when all Canadians can have a home.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I support Motion No. 147 without hesitation.

I want to thank my NDP colleague from Saskatoon West for giving us the opportunity today to talk about a troubling situation across Canada that I noticed when I was travelling as part of my right to housing tour.

It is incredible, but true. In Pelican Narrows, northern Saskatchewan, at 30 degrees below zero, I met people who literally had no shelter: a man who was rightly discouraged, frustrated, and very angry; a mother with her young child; and an older man with a walker. All that at 30 degrees below zero, in a remote region where there is not enough housing for everyone, and where some homes are condemned because they are not in good enough condition to be lived in.

I want to commend my colleague on this private member's motion and offer her my full support so that, as the new NDP housing critic, she may carry on the work that our predecessors and I began in order to advance the cause of under-housed and homeless people in Canada.

As I have been saying for a long time, it is high time that Canada took the necessary steps to end homelessness, which is unacceptable in a country as rich as ours. It is not right that a country that has the wealth that we do is not doing more to put an end to homelessness.

The motion of my colleague from Saskatoon West is very much in keeping with this position. The purpose of that motion is to appoint a special House of Commons committee to conduct hearings on the matter of homelessness in Canada and propose a plan to prevent and ultimately end homelessness. The committee would be expected to report to the House no later than 12 months after the adoption of this motion.

One of the things that stood out to me the most in my quest to determine the extent of the housing and homelessness crisis in Canada was that a number of groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness. They include indigenous people, women, seniors, youth, veterans, and members of the LGBTQ community.

Fortunately, communities have already begun to develop their own tailored approaches to fighting and ending homelessness locally. For example, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Fort McMurray participated in Alberta's 7 cities project to end homelessness and are making progress. Edmonton and Calgary are also part of the program and have implemented plans to end homelessness.

What all of these municipalities have in common is that they have chosen a novel approach. Rather than simply manage the problem, they are working toward the much more ambitious goal of eradicating it.

Other communities, such as Montreal, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon, have also come up with plans to prevent and end homelessness, because that should be the main objective: ending homelessness. The first step toward doing that is to adopt a plan with clear, measurable goals.

Even so, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness in this country. Plans to achieve that goal in a given community will vary from one region to the next, as they already do. As I said, some communities have already implemented plans that work.

In order to achieve our ultimate goal, the federal government needs to clearly define its role and adopt its own national plan. It is simply a matter of being serious about our desire to eradicate this scourge and recognizing the vital role the federal government must play in supporting efforts at the local level.

Creating a national plan to prevent and end homelessness would be the first step. That is precisely the purpose of this motion.

Private Members' Business

The government released some details of its national housing strategy a few months ago. For example, it has set a target of reducing chronic homelessness by 50%. We think that we need to be much more ambitious and aim to completely eradicate homelessness as quickly as possible. To achieve that, I repeat, we need a plan. We have to assess the needs, give communities enough flexibility to determine the best methods, and support them by giving them the means to achieve their goals.

We can no longer focus on simply managing the situation, as though we accept that it exists and we assume that it always will. We need to tackle it, prevent it, and ultimately completely eradicate it. Even one homeless person is one too many. We are talking about human beings—men, women, and children.

For those who like numbers, we can also talk about the numbers. Beyond the humanitarian reasons, there are also economic reasons for eradicating homelessness, because there is a cost associated with it.

• (1735)

It costs the government and the Canadian economy more to accept homelessness as a problem without a solution than to collectively invest the money it would take to put an end to it. It is estimated that our current response to homelessness, which consists almost exclusively of providing emergency services, costs the Canadian economy and taxpayers approximately \$7 billion a year in direct and indirect costs. That is a huge amount. Just imagine the stock of social housing that could be built with these billions of dollars.

The direct costs of homelessness include amounts spent on emergency services, such as shelters and direct services to homeless people, while indirect costs include the costs associated with increased use of health care services, law enforcement, and the criminal justice system.

It is estimated that the monthly costs for housing a homeless person are \$10,900 for a hospital bed, \$4,333 for provincial jail, and \$1,932 for a shelter bed, but only \$701 for a rent supplement and \$199.92 for social housing.

Since people who live on the streets are much more likely to go to the hospital or to be involved with our criminal justice system, we collectively have a vested interest in solving this problem at the source.

As we in the NDP often say, budgets are about choices. Canadian researchers have conclusively shown that we could save a lot of money by making the right choices.

By the most conservative estimate, 235,000 people experience homelessness in a given year in Canada.

According to a 2014 joint study by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the gradual withdrawal of the federal government's investment in social housing is one of the main causes of this situation.

For a long time now, I have been calling on the federal government to start by investing significantly in social housing, which has been shown to be the cheapest option for taxpayers to

fight homelessness. I cited the supporting figures a few moments ago.

With my colleague's motion that we are debating today, we are reaching out to all parliamentarians so we can work together to implement a serious plan to end homelessness.

To do that, parliamentarians need to be put in touch with people who know this situation well because they live it every day or because they witness it through their work, such as communities, homeless outreach workers, non-profit organizations, academics, indigenous groups, and people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. These are people who can pool their knowledge and best practices and find and apply effective solutions that are tailored to local needs. It is important to have a plan that is flexible enough to respond to the very different situations we see across the country.

The situation in northern Saskatchewan that I described earlier is completely different from the situation of my former colleague Roger, who became homeless in the middle of Montreal.

The government must step up and show that Parliament is determined to take action to prevent and put an end to homelessness in Canada. Although I have some concerns and there are many questions that remain, I recognize that the Liberals have shown openness and goodwill by creating a national housing strategy.

With Motion No. 147, the government has an unprecedented opportunity to put its money where its mouth is by allowing other parliamentarians to collaborate on developing a national plan to end homelessness. Creating a special committee would send a clear message to Canadians that the national housing strategy is the first step in a major pan-Canadian initiative.

We are not the only ones saying so. The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, or CHRA, one of the main national organizations that represents the interests of the social, affordable, and non-profit housing sector in Canada, supports the motion. CHRA believes that with a new national housing strategy forthcoming, it is imperative that the federal government and federal decision-makers maintain a focus on addressing the scourge of homelessness, and put in place a mechanism that can identify the tools, policies, and programs that will provide access to safe and affordable housing for all people living in Canada.

CHRA believes that a special committee on homelessness would provide such a mechanism. This motion from the member for Saskatoon West is essentially giving this government an empty net. It would be far too sad if the government were to miss this shot.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to clarify an answer I gave during question period today in response to a question that I misheard on the recent earthquake in Taiwan.

As our government said on February 9, we extend our deep condolences to all those affected by the earthquake in Taiwan.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

To date, the federal government has received no request for assistance from the Taiwanese authorities.

[English]

However, we would of course strongly consider any request for assistance that we receive from Taiwan.

The Deputy Speaker: The House appreciates the clarification at the earliest opportunity from the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 147, a motion sponsored by the member for Saskatoon West that would appoint a special parliamentary committee to conduct hearings on homelessness, and develop a national plan to end homelessness within 12 months of the motion's adoption.

The member cares deeply about this issue, and we respect her for that. We welcome her passion and dedication to this issue. However, the government is unable to support Motion No. 147.

The fact is Motion No. 147 duplicates and would delay critical work this government is already doing on this vital issue.

• (1745)

Our government established an advisory committee on homelessness in June 2017. This 13 member committee includes housing and homeless experts, local and regional service providers, and most importantly, individuals with lived experience of homelessness. They reflect Canada's cultural, linguistic, and regional diversity. It is an extraordinary group of leaders.

It has been my honour to chair this advisory committee, and to join it as it has travelled from coast to coast to coast to hear Canadians share their insights and experiences. I have personally been in more than 24 communities, and spent days upon days with front line workers, people with lived experience, front line service providers, municipal governments, and provincial authorities studying this issue in concert with the entire workforce and social agencies embraced by this issue.

Through roundtables and forums, to town halls, online engagement, the message that Canadians have given to the advisory committee on homelessness has been absolutely clear. It is time to move from consultation and study, and get down to direct action.

Motion No. 147 would disregard this message in favour of spending yet another year studying the issue. This is time and more importantly money that could be better spent on directly addressing issues related to homelessness.

It would also ask organizations that are fighting homelessness to take their time to come to Ottawa, and to once again provide testimony. We would rather they provide services to people than provide testimony to another committee of Parliament. They have already provided feedback and input with their ideas, and they are eager now to work with us at implementing solutions.

Motion No. 147's special committee would also disregard one of the other crystal clear messages we heard in our listening exercises which is that housing is fundamentally a local issue, and requires local solutions funded federally, but designed and delivered on a community-by-community basis on a person-by-person basis.

The federal government's role is to collaborate, listen, finance, fund, and support, but it is not to rule from above, and drop solutions from Ottawa onto communities across this country, and impose programs rather than develop them with local partners.

Front line workers and people with lived experience in homelessness have told us time and time again that if we want lasting permanent change, it needs to come from communities. It cannot be dictated by federal programs.

I look forward to sharing the results of this engagement more thoroughly in a few weeks and days when we release the "What We Heard" report. The results of these listening exercises and study sessions, aligned with other studies on homelessness and poverty that have also been undertaken by this government, are part of our total redesign and launch of Canada's first ever national housing strategy.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities recently completed a study on poverty reduction, on seniors housing, and on seniors issues. All of these studies must include strategies to deal with housing shortages, homelessness, and people in core housing need.

As part of our engagement with this panel on poverty reduction strategies, which is about to be released and disclosed to all members of Parliament and Canadians, we also have people with lived experience on that committee as well. The minister's advisory committee has been focusing on giving us input as to how we can develop programs on housing and homelessness.

Something else is critically important. Preventing homelessness requires an all of government approach. It is not a single issue. It has to be placed within the context of a housing strategy, and only focusing on homelessness does not get us there. It has to be part of a strategy that focuses on income supports. It has to be part of a strategy that also deals with social security programs.

HUMA integrates this approach. It is a standing committee of Parliament. It will be reported, as part of the national housing strategy, on a regular, go-forward basis. This is the place to get a comprehensive holistic approach to homelessness addressed properly. We have a standing committee.

Private Members' Business

The national housing strategy is perhaps the most important program this government has released in its two years in office. It was just released last November, after 18 months of study and consultation with groups, provinces, territories, indigenous leadership, people with lived experience, homeless activists, housing providers on the ground, both civic and governmental. Part of that engagement and online study, and collection of data and information has produced the most comprehensive approach to housing. It is the most properly funded program our country has ever seen.

In fact, supporting Motion No. 147 would have a negative impact. It would force us to redesign the homelessness program that is part of that strategy, and start all over again. We cannot do this. The current program expires within the 12-month study period in which the member's motion seeks to report back. In other words, the program will expire while the committee is studying what to do next. We need to act now.

If we launch a new consultation process, results will not come from it for another 12 months. That will delay implementation. It will have a terrible impact.

The NDP often says that we should consult more before we act, or that we should act now and stop consulting. The members cannot have it both ways. We have done the consultation. We are about to launch that study, that program, but we have already doubled the investment, ensuring local communities have the resources they need to fight this terrible problem.

I want to underline this fact, because it is another key reason we are opposing the motion.

On the national housing strategy, \$40 billion over 10 years, in our first budget we doubled the dollars that the previous government put in place. That doubling of the dollars immediately put in new resources while we studied it. Now, in the 10-year program, we have new programs and new approaches that will fortify and expand the approach to prevent and provide permanent solutions to homelessness, instead of just dealing with the crisis on too many of our city streets.

The advice we are getting from the advisory committee on homelessness is critical. It has given us good advice on how to integrate the two programs. With these investments, we will be better equipped to tackle homelessness, and we can start reducing, if not eliminating it by 2027-28.

Also, in budget 2017, our government committed to engaging with stakeholders, provinces, territories, and indigenous governance organizations, as well as urban indigenous housing providers, to ensure our approach was also consistent with the principles of truth and reconciliation. Again, it is critical that at every step of the way people with lived experience must be at the table. "Nothing about us without us" is fundamental to the approach the government takes to fighting homelessness.

This work is only part of government's broader housing plan. As I said, there is a \$10 billion plan to give all Canadians a safe, secure, affordable place to call home.

As we said when we announced the strategy last November, the NHS is geared toward people with housing needs, including

indigenous peoples, women and children, families fleeing family violence, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, LGBT two-spirited community and queer community, and those dealing with mental health and addiction issues, who too often find themselves on city streets. Additionally, young people in care, the super highway to homelessness as is described by a landmark study by the Canadian Observatory On Homelessness. If we wait to act on that critical population, we will be putting young people in harm's way. I will not do that as a parliamentarian.

To meet the needs of these vulnerable populations, we are going to collaborate, foster innovation, support proper data collection. We are going to find a solution to the problem. The NHS includes and recognizes that all Canadians have a right to housing, and that a rights-based framework to housing requires us to address the homelessness situation that defines too many urban, rural, and northern communities in our country.

To back this up, we are redesigning the strategy. We will coordinate with national housing benefit, as well as programs and policies. The rights of people with disabilities are also being integrated into our approaches.

Perhaps most important, we will also enshrine the right to housing into law through legislation, to ensure that while this may be the first national housing strategy, it will not be the last. Again, it will be framed within a rights-based approach to housing, endorsed by the UN rapporteur on housing, and mayors and leaders across the country.

Our broader efforts to reduce poverty are part of this strategy. Those, too, will be based on extensive consultation with people with lived experience.

• (1750)

Once again, I want to thank the member for Saskatoon West for all her hard work. I know that she understands and cares about this issue. I know that she wants solutions delivered tomorrow, if not yesterday. I respect that.

These are goals this government shares, but these are goals this government is already acting on. We cannot support this motion, because it would slow down and push away from the table people with lived experience. Those are the folks we need to help. Those are the folks we are talking to. Those are the people we are going to deliver a national housing strategy for.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion No. 147. I would like to thank the hon. member for Saskatoon West for bringing forth this motion. I am deeply disappointed that the Liberal government cannot support her motion.

Sadly, not all Canadians have a place to call home. Many more have wholly inadequate housing to call home. Having a home is a critical part of being a human and a productive member of society. Having a home, a fixed address, is the stable foundation everyone needs.

Private Members' Business

Canada has failed, all governments at all levels, to fix Canada's homelessness problem. In fact, it has continued to get worse as we throw more money at this problem.

Housing advocates tell us that Canada has up to 8,000 chronically homeless individuals. These folks usually have associated mental, addiction, and social challenges that make them the most difficult to find housing solutions for. On any given night, it is estimated that roughly 35,000 Canadians face homelessness. These folks find themselves in and out of the shelter system.

It is estimated that about 235,000 Canadians face homelessness every year. This is a group of Canadians, making up a population comparable to the city of Regina, who have a problem finding homes. We are short housing options for an entire city's worth of people. We essentially need to build a major city just to fix our housing problems.

The time has come for us to honestly look at what we have done and what we are doing and determine what is working and what is not. It is time to be honest with ourselves about our past efforts if we are going to improve those going forward. This is why I support the call for a special committee to put together a national plan to deal with homelessness.

How can we not look at the housing issue when there are over 235,000 Canadians desperately in need? Every day we walk out there and see a temporary hockey rink that would have built about 21 average homes in Canada. Where are our priorities?

Back in 2007, I chaired an Alberta provincial MLA task force to look at affordable housing issues. We went across the province of Alberta to get input on the issues. We set out to find innovative and practical ways to make affordable housing more accessible and available. We focused on solutions for the homeless, affordable housing, including subsidized rentals and home ownership. By bringing together representatives from municipalities, business, community leaders, industry associations, political parties, and the non-profit sector, we were able to get a broad base of expertise and knowledge on housing matters. We were able to build a large list of recommendations and policy goals for governments at all levels. While many of the recommendations were embraced, others were not. However, we were successful in getting a long overdue conversation going and millions of dollars directed to addressing this problem.

My work with the homeless did not end with the task force. For a number of years afterward, I served on the board of the Calgary Homeless Foundation. This year will mark the 10th anniversary since the foundation led the creation of Calgary's 10-year plan to end homelessness. We will mark this anniversary, but we will not be celebrating. We still have a homeless problem in Calgary and across Canada. By all counts, it is getting worse, not better. Ten years after Calgary's 10-year plan to end homelessness, we still have too many homeless in Calgary. Those involved are working hard, but the problem is growing. Much of the cause is beyond their control, such as the economic downturn, housing prices in Calgary, the opioid epidemic, and more. At the same time, the solution is not to build more shelters. We need to find a way to have affordable housing as a reality.

One of the most cited psychologists of the 20th century, Abraham Maslow, published his now famous hierarchy of needs. Basically, it summarizes the stages of human growth and ranks human needs. The need for shelter or housing is listed as the first level of need, right beside food, air, and water. Without adequate shelter, we cannot develop as humans.

• (1755)

We will not move to the next stage of development until the first stage needs are satisfied. At the most basic of levels, we as a society provide emergency shelters. These are horrible places to exist, but they do offer a better alternative than the frozen streets, and allow folks to begin getting the help they need. After that, there are various other arrangements depending on where one lives, and what one's needs are. While they do offer a level of housing, shelters are supported living, and not long-term, independent living solutions.

Canada, the taxpayer, cannot afford to pay for housing for everyone forever. As a nation, we need to find a way to create affordable, sustainable, dependable, and independent housing solutions. We will only truly address the homelessness issue if we get people into their own homes and not rely on shelters.

Once someone controls his or her own housing situation, according to Maslow, only then will he or she be able to move to the next level, and then on to self-actualization.

The next level of Maslow's theory is the safety needs and includes things like personal security, financial security, health and well-being. Addressing all these needs obviously requires someone to have stable housing of one's own.

The most affordable type of independent housing is a bachelor suite or a single occupancy unit. I would recommend that any study strongly address the need for more bachelor units in Canada. If we want to have more people living in a place of their own, we have to work at increasing the supply of these more affordable housing options. For those with modest incomes, the climb up from a shelter to a one-bedroom or two-bedroom apartment is too big. They need something affordable in between. Since 1990, the number of bachelor units has dropped dramatically. There has been a 40% drop in the most affordable type of housing in Canada. I do not understand it.

In my riding of Calgary Confederation there are only 200 bachelor apartments. That represents one-third of 1% of homes in my riding. The average rental rate for a bachelor apartment in Calgary is 20% less than that of a one-bedroom unit. It is about \$825 a month compared to \$1,025 per month. For some people, \$200 is the difference between housing affordability and living in a shelter. For others, it is the difference between having to choose between food and rent.

Private Members' Business

Another aspect that needs to be addressed is the shocking decrease in overall rental units here in Canada. Since 1990, the total number of rental units has dropped per capita by 15%, which has further driven up rental costs. In many larger communities, rental costs now regularly exceed average mortgage payments.

I will be voting in support of this motion. I will be supporting the need for the government and organizations to address our affordable housing problems in Canada.

I reiterate that I am deeply disappointed that the Liberal government will not support this motion.

● (1800)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in support of Motion No. 147, which was introduced by my colleague from Saskatoon West, to create a special committee on homelessness. This is one of the most important motions that have been put forward in the House, and I want to speak about the importance of that.

I really appreciate my colleague from the Conservative Party who talked about not everyone having a home. It is really important we bring that up, because it is so true throughout our country. We know in every community homelessness exists, but it does not just exist. It is on the rise. I really appreciate that we are here today. The government talks about what it is doing, where it has been, and what it is doing about this issue. I do not want talk about who is doing what. I want to talk about the people who do not have a home. That is what this is about and what we need to talk about. I do not think the government understands the sense of urgency in our community for people's lives and the families being affected by homelessness. We know it affects everyone.

One thing we do not talk about is that we are all one tragedy away from being on the street. I was in Port Alberni at the shelter and met this wonderful man who had lived a great life. He had worked his whole life, was getting ready for retirement, but then lost his wife in a tragic accident. He does not remember the last three years. It just vanished. He woke up and was in the shelter in Port Alberni when he realized what had happened to him, and he had lost everything. That could happen to any one of us. We are all one tragedy or incident away from being on the street. We are seeing it all the time with people experimenting with drugs, especially with the opioid crisis.

I will speak about my riding because that is what I know best. We do not talk a lot about homelessness in rural communities. Right now, we have a housing crisis in our country. We talk a lot about the greater Toronto area, Vancouver, and the greater Vancouver area. However, on Vancouver Island, we are in close proximity to Vancouver and the spillover effect is having a massive impact in our communities. In fact, we are seeing real estate prices being driven up more than 20% over last year. For people who are marginalized or struggling, it plays out in such a way that they are moving from the mainland to Victoria or Nanaimo, and the people in those communities are being pushed out into more remote communities.

I live in one of those communities, Port Alberni, which was the most affordable place in southwestern British Columbia. It had a disproportionate amount of people living on income assistance. In fact, Port Alberni was 250% above the provincial average for people living on income assistance. The reason being was that people could

rent a place for \$400 a month, be earning \$635 a month on income assistance, and could afford to live there on a meagre income of \$235 a month to buy groceries, medicine, and clothing. However, as we know, people living with low incomes, many people living with disabilities receiving low incomes to survive, were gravitating to our communities in Courtenay and Port Alberni because they were affordable.

However, now we are seeing our real estate prices getting pushed up. People living on low incomes often have a transient place to live because sometimes they cannot make ends meet and have to move out. Their landlord moves them out because they could not pay their bills. There is nowhere for them to go now. They cannot afford to live anywhere on their meagre income and are ending up on the street. We have never seen a housing crisis like this, ever, on Vancouver Island.

In Courtenay, for example, the vacancy rate is 0.4% in the Comox Valley. We have incredible organizations working there trying to find people a place to live. However, we have not built one purpose-built place to live for low-barrier housing in the Comox Valley, never, and that is not working right now when we have a housing crisis. We now have hundreds of people living on the street, and we are not prepared. It is great to have a national housing strategy, but we need a strategy focused on people living on the street. They are facing different situations. We need work that is integrated with the provinces.

● (1805)

People living on the street move. We cannot just download it to local government and say it is their responsibility to fix it. This is a national problem, and people who are vulnerable, living on the street, are transient. They are moving around because they have nowhere to go. It is important that we recognize that.

I met a man in Port Alberni at the Port Alberni Shelter Society. He was living in a low-barrier house. I found out about his story. I will call him John. I have told this story in the House, but I want to protect him and his family. His story is this. John drinks every day. He still does. However, he used to drink every day and end up on the street where he lived drunk. He would pass out and the police would get called, or the fire or ambulance. They would take him to the hospital, tying up an acute care bed in the hospital, and they might do X-rays. Other times, they would throw him into a cell at the RCMP, then release him, and he would do it all over again.

To lowball it, let us call it \$2,000 a day, because it was every day. I am going to lowball it even more and say it is only \$600,000 a year. However, the Port Alberni Shelter Society operates on funds raised by the city, the good people of Port Alberni, the good people in the community, and the business community. People donate because they care. They know that everyone deserves a roof over their heads.

Private Members' Business

The Port Alberni Shelter Society is bursting at the seams. It cannot house the amount of people who need a place to live. They found him a place to live in low-barrier housing, at \$475 a month. Let us call it \$6,000 a year, instead of \$600,000 a year. To those people who say we should not be funding people that need a place to live because it is not our responsibility as taxpayers, I say it is prudent as government leaders to protect taxpayers and make sure people who are vulnerable, who are living on the streets, have dignity and a place to sleep, like my friend in Port Alberni. He has a shower every day, a bed to sleep in, and he has dignity. His story is so powerful. All the first responders know him. They know his story, and they know it is the right thing to do.

I met a single mom in Courtenay. She said she was born and raised there. Her parents, her grandparents, and great-grandparents lived there, and she may have to leave her community because she has nowhere to go. She is a single mom. She asked, "How am I supposed to get by?" With rent growing at 20% a year, we know it is impossible for that to be sustainable. That is not just impacting people who are struggling, who feel vulnerable, and who might give up. They might give up because it is too hard, but it affects our culture. It affects our community and our knowledge.

I want to highlight some of the people being affected. We have the highest youth unemployment rate we have seen in decades in our country and on Vancouver Island. We have a housing crisis. We have a really difficult time for seniors and veterans. As the critic for veterans affairs, I had the chance to meet the representative, Deb Lowther from VETS Canada. She says she thinks there are probably easily about 5,000 veterans living on the streets of our country. Clearly, we have a problem when our veterans do not have a place to live, and when our seniors do not have a place to live. We have to fix this.

A special committee would do that. It would put the attention on the people who are the most vulnerable in our society. We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet we have a skyrocketing problem with homelessness. We have an opioid crisis right now, which is impacting every community across our country. When people are living on the street, how are they supposed to heal? How are they supposed to get the rehabilitation they need if they have addictions or mental health issues? They need a place to live.

It is good for the economy. It is good for business people. We have seen crime skyrocket in my community. Businesses are closing because homeless people who are feeding addictions and struggling need a place to live. I outlined the savings to the taxpayers for services, for the criminal justice system, and for the health care system. I could go on and on. It is also good for businesses.

My friend from Kootenay—Columbia talked about how it is affecting his community. It is not just my community. It is rural communities across the country.

The Prime Minister's goal of cutting homelessness by 50% in the next 10 years is not acceptable. Where is the urgency from the government? If the Liberals support the motion, then it shows they back up the sense of urgency and that they understand how urgent this is for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

I want to thank my colleague for introducing this very important motion in the House.

● (1810)

The Deputy Speaker: There remains only enough time in the time provided for private members' business today for the right of reply for the hon. member for Saskatoon West. Therefore, we will go to her now. She has up to five minutes.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin with a quote, which states:

I would encourage the member for Saskatoon West, as well as all members from all parties and all parts of the country, to become part of the government's nationwide efforts to ensure that all Canadians have the safe and affordable housing they need and deserve.

Through you, to my hon. colleague from South Shore—St. Margarets, and to all parliamentarians on all sides of this House, I say that her call to be part of the government's efforts is exactly what my motion, Motion No. 147, is all about. It is about including all parliamentarians in our collective leadership to end and prevent homelessness. That motion, to remind Canadians, is to create a national plan to end and prevent homelessness, a plan based on results and outcomes. It is not about the political right or left. It is about rolling up our sleeves, and with relentless focus, ending homelessness in this country.

However, I am at a loss as to how we rally the support of Canadians, ourselves, and parliamentarians and tackle such an urgent issue as homelessness by saying that we will only go halfway. We are going to house only 50% of homeless Canadians over 10 years. We can and must do so much better.

We owe an urgent response to each and every Canadian living on our streets without safety or shelter. They are our children, our loved ones, our families, our friends, and our veterans. I want all Canadians to be able to hold in their hands our plan to end and prevent homelessness and say, "This is where my government is going. This is how they are going to get there, and I can hold them to it."

I want to thank the countless number of Canadians and organizations who support and endorse my motion, organizations like Raising the Roof, the Peel Alliance to End Homelessness, OUTSaskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the Canadian Housing & Renewal Association, Upstream, the mayor of Saskatoon, the YWCAs of Saskatoon and Lethbridge, the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, and the Alberta Federation of Labour, to name a few. I want to thank my fellow parliamentarians who took the time to meet with me to talk about how we can and must end homelessness in this country.

Adjournment Proceedings

Two weekends ago, I held a town hall in my adopted neighbourhood in Ottawa at the Centretown United Church. Despite the snow, the lure of Winterlude, and the Super Bowl, people actually came. The one overriding question that emerged was this: where is the urgency by governments to end homelessness? Only one speaker that day got a standing ovation, and it was not me.

Tyler Palmer works for the Youth Services Bureau as a community developer working with tenant organizations. As a young person who has experienced homelessness, Tyler speaks from a place that most of us can only imagine. He said:

...homelessness is its own place: a world of fear and shame, that often feels impossible to escape.... it is hard to fathom why something so basic as shelter is still as elusive as it is, especially in a prosperous and stable country like Canada.

The face of homelessness is changing. It affects young and old, women, families, and children.

Tyler went on to say:

Many come from privileged or advantaged families. No one is immune.... [Many queer and trans youth] are still expelled from their former lives just for being who they are.... In short, homelessness is not just an economic problem, it is a human problem.... As a society, we are on the same road: all of us can do our part. I firmly believe that, only together, can we end the isolation and grief that homelessness creates.

I agree with Tyler. That is why I ask that we all work together to create a federal plan to end homelessness.

Ten years from now, let us not regret what could have been or how far we could have come. Ten years from now, we will have an opportunity to be proud of our efforts as parliamentarians toward ending and preventing homelessness in Canada. We will have the chance to be thankful that we worked together in 2018, that parliamentarians chose to recognize that housing rights are human rights and that our country refused to abandon the most vulnerable.

An urgent and bold federal intervention into the homelessness crisis is possible. Let us work together to build a plan and make sure we get it right. We need not wait for a more perfect time.

• (1815)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 28, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1820)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to talk about taxes once again. I am following-up on a question I put November 8 to the Minister of National Revenue, specifically on the information that was being withheld from diabetics and Diabetes Canada. They had been requesting information on things such as data, applications, exceptions, and rejections, as compared to two or three years ago. There was a consistent pattern in the fall of the government going after diabetics, and denying their claims for the disability tax credit.

Today, I am following-up on it, because we heard at committee the chair, the member for Malpeque, putting the CRA on notice. He said that he expected the chief commissioner to bring with him the data that will show, as best as CRA can, what the applications were, what the exceptions and rejections were as compared to two or three years ago. He also expected the time frames on applications and the turnarounds on those applications over the past five-year period.

This is information that Diabetes Canada and members of Parliament have requested repeatedly. It is information that the CRA admitted to withholding, because it did not want to reveal private information. CRA can provide data on taxation in a way that does not reveal a person's individual information and does not identify them. That information has yet to come to the committee, and that is why I am rising here again today.

When can we expect this information to be given to the committee, to the House of Commons, and to members of Parliament who have diabetics in their constituencies? I have individuals in my riding, as well, who had their applications rejected by the government on a groundless basis saying they no longer needed access to the DTC, the disability tax credit.

When can we expect this information? Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that it will be provided to the committee and tabled in the House?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. My colleague, the Minister of National Revenue, recognizes well that the disability tax credit, or DTC, is important to Canadians who are living with disabilities. That is why last fall she reinstated the disability advisory committee. This committee will increase the agency's understanding of the real challenges faced by Canadians living with disabilities, and help us to improve the delivery of the tax credits and benefits upon which they rely.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*Translation*]

The Disability Advisory Committee held its first meeting in January. Its members had a fruitful discussion with the Canada Revenue Agency on the disability tax credit legislation, CRA's current administrative practices, and the objectives of the committee.

The CRA is striving to be more transparent in the application and administration of the disability tax credit. It published detailed statistics on the disability tax credit on Canada.ca. Moving forward, data on the disability tax credit, including the number of people applying for the credit, the amounts claimed, and the number of accepted and rejected applications, will be published annually.

[*English*]

Furthermore, the agency recently established the position of chief data officer, an officer who will provide leadership and oversight as we take steps to enhance our approach to data management. As was announced in budget 2017, our government has made it easier for Canadians to apply for the DTC by allowing nurse practitioners to certify on the application form the medical information and the effects of the impairment.

Canada is at its best, and all of society benefits, when everyone is included. That is why our government is committed to ensuring greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities in their communities and workplaces. I can assure everyone that the Minister of National Revenue remains strongly committed to improving the CRA's services and ensuring that Canadians who are eligible for credit and benefits do receive them.

• (1825)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member was able to say that the minister recognizes a bunch of things, but it does not answer the question of where the data is. There is this chief data person, but we were told at committee that one of the difficulties is that it is mostly on paper. We told them to collect information and go through the applications manually. There are civil servants there, and the committee serves like a board of directors demanding information.

There is a Yiddish proverb that says, "Out of desperation, one finds." At this point, both the committee of the House and the diabetics being refused their DTC applications are desperate for this information.

I ask the parliamentary secretary again. When can we expect that information? When will it be provided to the committee, and why is the minister hiding the information that Diabetes Canada wants?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, we will continue our government's work to ensure that the Canada Revenue Agency treats Canadians as important clients and not simply as taxpayers.

[*Translation*]

It has always been the minister's priority to ensure that all Canadians receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. That is why she reinstated the Disability Advisory Committee.

[*English*]

I, for one, am proud of our government's commitment to support Canadians with disabilities and their families. Our government has

consulted with over 6,000 Canadians on the development of new federal accessibility legislation. Canadians can rest assured that we will continue to work on making the disability tax credit even more accessible.

TAXATION

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Calgary Shepard for that excellent Yiddish proverb. It has been a while since I have heard one from him.

I too am rising on an issue involving the CRA and the disability tax credit.

On October 27, I asked the minister responsible for the Canada Revenue Agency if she could explain why she is hiking taxes on people suffering from type 1 diabetes. The response was frankly nonsense because she said that her department was not changing anything at all. She has repeated this assertion 11 times, both in the House and in committee, that neither the law nor the interpretation of the law has been changed, but we know that is false. Doctors themselves have come forward with letters from the CRA which clearly state that it is restricting eligibility for the tax credit, taking it away from people that had typically qualified for it in the past.

Under the law, those with type 1 diabetes have been eligible to receive the credit for at least the last 10 years as long as a doctor certified that they required life-sustaining therapy at least three times a week totalling 14 hours on average. The government is now taking the tax credit away from diabetics even when doctors certify they are eligible under the existing law and policy, neither of which apparently has changed. This new direction appears to have happened secretly, with no public notice or consultation with the diabetic community.

A family in my riding sent me a desperate plea for help. A family member needs seven needles every single day to manage his disability. On top of running the house, working all day, ensuring that her family member is healthy and receiving the medication the family member needs, this mother has to worry about this Liberal tax grab.

It is not just diabetes sufferers whom the Liberals are targeting for tax revenue. We have heard that sufferers of autism, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and other mental health issues are also being targeted by the Liberal government.

The Liberals like to talk about their middle-class tax cut, but thanks to their tax rampage, eliminating credits like the children's fitness tax credit, the education credit, and the public transit tax credit, and now changing the eligibility for the disability tax credit, net incomes are dropping. With the elimination of the income-splitting credit, Canadian families can see even more earnings being clawed back.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Fraser Institute states that eliminating the income-splitting tax credit effectively means an average \$949 tax hike on middle-class families, and that simply put, eliminating just the income splitting tax credit more than offset the benefit of the tax rate reduction.

The Liberals can wax poetic about how amazing they are and how they are the champions of the middle class, but their actions clearly indicate it is all smoke and mirrors.

Diabetes medication is a matter of life and death. This is not a choice for those suffering from it. Diabetics do not get to decide that they just will not take their medication, check their blood, or take a break to eat something. These are all things they have to do to stay healthy.

It appears the government's priorities are more focused on looking good than doing the right thing. We have over \$8 million spent on a temporary hockey rink, \$200,000 for the PM's illegal vacation on a billionaire's island, \$100,000 on the previous minister of health's Twitter account, and \$22,000 on Snapchat filters, and yet somehow, for some reason, the government's response to this waste of taxpayers' money is to target people suffering from an incurable disease.

There is an aphorism called Hanlon's razor that says not to attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by incompetence. I have to ask the minister, which is it with her handling of the government's attack on diabetics, malice or incompetence?

● (1830)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first start by asking the hon. member if the Fraser Institute mistakenly or blatantly forgot to calculate the benefit of the new Canada child benefit which helps nine out of 10 Canadian families, when calculating the positive benefits that this government has put in place to help the middle class and those working hard to join it, but I digress.

I am always happy to help my hon. friend understand more fully information on the disability tax credit, which has already been shared, as I know he is aware, on multiple occasions this week in the House.

[*Translation*]

Let me be perfectly clear. Our government is determined to improve the services provided by the Canada Revenue Agency. Our objective is for the CRA to treat Canadians like important clients and not just as taxpayers.

[*English*]

Unlike the previous government, our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians with disabilities not only receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled, but are also able to advise the CRA on how best to serve them.

One way we have done this is by reinstating the disability advisory committee, which the previous government abolished in 2006. After more than 10 years without a voice, Canadians with disabilities, stakeholders, and experts are able to engage with the CRA and provide insight on how best to ensure that they receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Additionally, through national consultations, our government has engaged with over 6,000 Canadians to help inform the development of new federal accessibility legislation that we hope to table this spring.

[*Translation*]

In addition to hearing from Canadians with disabilities directly, our government has taken practical measures to make it easier to apply for the disability tax credit.

Nurse practitioners can now certify medical information and the effects of an impairment on the application form, making the process much easier and more accessible.

Contrary to what my colleague is claiming, the majority of the applications received by the CRA are approved, allowing more than 700,000 Canadians to claim the disability tax credit on their annual tax return.

[*English*]

Last, our government is committed to ensuring that not only Canadians with disabilities but all Canadians receive the benefits and credits to which they are entitled. That is why the CRA is working hard to better serve Canadians. For example, the new file my return service enables eligible Canadians, particularly those with a low or fixed income, to file their returns by answering a few questions over the phone. This year, paper tax filers will be mailed their T1 forms directly through the mail.

The CRA and Service Canada are working closely together to ensure indigenous communities across Canada receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, we have asked repeatedly in the House about the disability tax credit being changed.

The Minister of National Revenue stood in the House and in committee 11 times and said that it had not changed and that the interpretation had not changed. We have a letter from May 2, an internal CRA memo, that states very clearly the various changes and the way it will take away this tax credit.

I realize the government was hoping the issue would stay out of the public eye, but I can assure members that constituents in my riding who rely on this credit are not letting go that easily. It is a shameful tax grab by the government. It is time to put Canada's most vulnerable ahead of a temporary hockey rink on the House lawn.

Again, will the minister do the right thing and commit to rolling back this terrible tax on diabetes sufferers?

● (1835)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, all 11 times the question has been raised, the minister, the parliamentary secretary, and our government has been unequivocal that we are committed to ensuring that Canadians with disabilities receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled.

[Translation]

Canada is at its best, and all of society benefits, when everyone is included. That is why our government is committed to ensuring greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities in their communities and workplaces.

[English]

More Canadians were approved for this important credit last year than ever before. That is good news, and we hope to see that trend continue.

HEALTH

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to talk tonight about the Canada food guide and the changes to it.

The government is proposing massive changes to the Canada food guide. However, farmers and producers had not been allowed to have input in it, which seems a little strange. Producers have the science and knowledge, and the government says that science is important, but they were excluded from the process up until just recently.

The government talks about liking to consult. The Liberals consult with everybody. They are always talking about consulting. However, for the food guide, they wanted to exclude the producers, the guys with the science, the guys who know what they are doing. They wanted to exclude those guys and go on ideology instead.

For a government that supports supply management in agreements with the EU, in the TPP and NAFTA, all those products under supply management, it does not want to have the producers it is protecting be part of working on the food guide. It seems a little strange.

What is the apprehension about listening to the producers? What did the Liberals not want to know about the science from the producers, the guys with the knowledge of what they are doing? Why were they afraid of listening to those guys in their hearings? This has recently changed, but for months they stonewalled and did not want to listen to the producers. That is where the science is.

We can talk about the things the Liberals want to change. When they want to make changes to meat protein and lump it in with plant protein, it creates confusion out there. The meat producers know that the protein-to-calorie ratio of meat is really strong when compared to that of common vegetables. With the amount of peanut butter we would have to eat to match what we would get from a meat protein, we would be pretty big if we ate that much peanut butter, compared to the calories and the protein from meat.

Rather than risk confusion for the Canadian consumer, we should keep it simple, keep the meat protein in there, and listen to the producers who have the science and knowledge. Plant protein is great, but meat protein is fantastic.

As we move forward in studying the Canada food guide and developing this program, having the producers, who have the knowledge and the science, speak to it is critical. Now that the Liberals have finally changed their mind and will listen to them, they should take that science-based knowledge and use it in developing

Adjournment Proceedings

the food guide, and not just use ideology. We do not want to see dairy products like cheese labelled with a warning sign. That is wrong.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to rise again, and I thank my colleague from Bow River for the opportunity to speak.

The member will know that there are two tenets upon which the government makes its decisions. One of those is following evidence-based policy and science, and the other is ensuring adequate and extensive consultation with important stakeholder groups. As the member mentioned, the minister has taken those two things into full consideration in the development of the Canada food guide.

I would like to reassure the member that Health Canada is not proposing to remove meat from Canada's food guide whatsoever. Rather, the objective of Canada's new food guide would be to provide a foundation for healthy eating that promotes health and reduces the risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases, which is a foundation that includes a wide variety of nutritious foods. Now more than ever, Health Canada is committed to supporting the nutritional health and well-being of Canadians, with the goal of reducing the rates of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

● (1840)

[Translation]

In Canada, the rate of obesity and chronic disease has reached devastating levels. Today, more than one in five Canadians suffer from a chronic illness, and that rate rises every year. These diseases have high social and economic costs. Every year, our health care systems spends billions of dollars treating these chronic conditions. Those costs are no longer feasible.

[English]

Science has established again and again that poor diet is a primary risk factor for these conditions. This is why Health Canada launched the comprehensive healthy eating strategy in October 2016. The healthy eating strategy is made up of complementary, mutually reinforcing initiatives, which will make it easier for Canadians to make healthier choices for themselves and their families.

[Translation]

The strategy follows through on the important commitments set out in the mandate, namely to promote public health by imposing restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy food to children, eliminating trans fats, reducing sodium, and improving nutritional information on packaged food.

However, if we want Canadians to make better food choices, then they need up-to-date guidance based on the most recent scientific evidence, as well as relevant, useful tools to help them in their choices. That is why updating Canada's food guide is a key component of the healthy eating strategy.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

The goal of revising Canada's food guide is to update our healthy eating recommendations based on the latest scientific evidence and to communicate our guidance in ways that better meet the needs of different users like health professionals, policy-makers, and the general public.

One of Health Canada's proposed recommendations for the food guide is to promote the regular intake of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and protein-rich foods, especially plant-based sources of protein.

[Translation]

It is important to note that Health Canada does not suggest that Canadians eliminate meat from their diet.

[English]

Health Canada has provided examples of protein rich foods that can be part of healthy eating, including both plant-based foods and animal-based foods. Indeed, the revised food guide will continue to encourage Canadians to choose from a variety of nutritious animal-based foods, including eggs, fish, other seafood, poultry, lean red meat, lower fat milk and yogurt, and cheeses lower in sodium and fat.

An important part of the work is considering the views of stakeholders, experts, and the general public. That is what the minister and this government are doing to finalize recommendations. Certainly the guidance and the recommendations will be rooted in science.

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the length of the list. All the things the member included were great. I agree there are many great plant proteins, but keeping meat proteins and dairy are really important in keeping people healthy.

Producers were excluded. They were told they were not stakeholders and could not participate. That was wrong. I am glad the government will at least let them be part of it. The science they bring to it is important.

The proposed labelling of dairy products with a warning label is saying it is like tobacco. I really disagree with that.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more important in government decision-making than making decisions based on science after lengthy consultation with important stakeholder groups, and that is going on. Today's food environment certainly makes it difficult for Canadians to make healthy food choices. That is why it is important to consult broadly and base these decisions in science.

We know healthy eating can be challenging due to several factors, some of which are beyond the control of the consumer. This is why Health Canada is taking action to make the healthier choice the easier choice for all Canadians.

We are committed to using the best and most recent evidence in our decision-making. We believe in a future where better food environments allow Canadians to make healthier eating choices as part of a healthy eating lifestyle.

In closing, let me thank my hon. colleague from Bow River for the chance to talk about this issue, which is so important to so many Canadians right across the country.

● (1845)

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Pursuant to an order made on Wednesday, January 31, the House stands adjourned until Monday, February 26, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, February 15, 2018

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Foreign Affairs and International Development

Mr. Nault 17253

Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

Ms. Kwan 17253

Bill C-398. Introduction and first reading 17253

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 17253

Petitions

Palliative Care

Mr. Warawa 17253

Sex Selection

Mr. Warawa 17253

Impaired Driving

Mr. Warawa 17253

The Environment

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 17253

Indigenous Affairs

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 17254

The Environment

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 17254

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lamoureux 17254

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Veterans Affairs

Mr. McColeman 17254

Motion 17254

Mrs. Caesar-Chavannes 17256

Mr. Johns 17257

Mr. McCauley 17257

Mr. Lamoureux 17257

Mrs. Romanado 17258

Mr. Brassard 17261

Mr. Johns 17261

Mrs. Caesar-Chavannes 17261

Mr. Brassard 17262

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 17262

Mr. Johns 17262

Mr. Lamoureux 17264

Mr. Gerretsen 17264

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 17264

Mr. Brassard 17266

Mr. Lamoureux 17266

Ms. Mathysen 17266

Mr. Brassard 17266

Mr. Gerretsen 17269

Ms. Benson 17269

Mr. Van Kesteren 17269

Mr. Lamoureux 17270

Mr. Rioux 17270

Ms. Tassi 17271

Mr. Julian 17271

Ms. Dzerowicz 17272

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 17273

Mr. Lamoureux 17274

Mr. O'Toole 17274

Mr. Gerretsen 17277

Ms. Mathysen 17277

Ms. Trudel 17278

Mrs. McCrimmon 17278

Mrs. Boucher 17279

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 17280

Ms. Lambropoulos 17280

Mr. Clarke 17281

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 17282

Mr. Clarke 17282

Mr. Hardie 17283

Ms. Quach 17284

Mrs. Stubbs 17284

Mr. Vaughan 17286

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

2018 Winter Olympics

Mr. Fuhr 17286

2018 Winter Olympics

Mr. Zimmer 17286

National Flag of Canada Day

Mr. Casey (Charlottetown) 17287

Clayton Murrell and Joan MacKinnon

Mr. Stetski 17287

Active Adult Centre of Mississauga

Mr. Fonseca 17287

2018 Winter Olympics

Mr. Shipley 17287

2018 Winter Olympics

Mr. Peterson 17288

Louis Riel

Ms. Mihychuk 17288

Canada Summer Jobs Program

Mr. Waugh 17288

Black History Month

Mr. Dubourg 17288

Festival du Voyageur

Mr. Vandal 17288

Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Poilievre 17289

Shooting at Florida High School	
Mr. DeCoursey	17289
Have a Heart Day	
Mr. Angus	17289
School Shooting in Florida	
Mr. Rayes	17289
Canada-China Year of Tourism	
Mr. Chen	17289

ORAL QUESTIONS

Veterans Affairs	
Ms. Bergen	17290
Mr. LeBlanc	17290
Ms. Bergen	17290
Mr. LeBlanc	17290
Mr. Rayes	17290
Mr. LeBlanc	17290
Mr. Rayes	17290
Mr. LeBlanc	17290
Mr. Rayes	17290
Mr. LeBlanc	17291
Ms. Brosseau	17291
Mr. LeBlanc	17291
Taxation	
Ms. Brosseau	17291
Ms. Bibeau	17291
Mr. Dusseault	17291
Ms. Bibeau	17291
Mr. Julian	17291
Ms. Bibeau	17292
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. McColeman	17292
Mrs. Romanado	17292
Mrs. Wagantall	17292
Mrs. Romanado	17292
Mr. Clarke	17292
Mrs. Romanado	17292
Mr. Clarke	17292
Mrs. Romanado	17293
Mr. O'Toole	17293
Mrs. Romanado	17293
Mr. Brassard	17293
Mrs. Romanado	17293
International Trade	
Ms. Ramsey	17293
Mr. Champagne	17293
Ms. Trudel	17293
Mr. Champagne	17294
Marijuana	
Mr. Berthold	17294
Ms. Petitpas Taylor	17294
Mrs. Boucher	17294
Mr. Holland	17294
Mr. Kelly	17294

Mr. Holland	17294
Mr. Kelly	17294
Mr. Holland	17294
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. Laverdière	17295
Mr. DeCoursey	17295
Mr. Garrison	17295
Mr. DeCoursey	17295
Democratic Reform	
Mr. Bittle	17295
Ms. Gould	17295
Natural Resources	
Mrs. Stubbs	17295
Mr. Carr	17295
Mrs. Stubbs	17296
Mr. Carr	17296
Mr. Schmale	17296
Mr. Carr	17296
Mrs. Kusie	17296
Mr. Carr	17296
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Ms. Kwan	17296
Mr. Hussen	17296
Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Johns	17296
Mr. LeBlanc	17297
Finance	
Mr. Deltell	17297
Mr. Lightbound	17297
Mr. Poilievre	17297
Mr. Lightbound	17297
Mr. Poilievre	17297
Mr. Lightbound	17297
The Economy	
Mr. Baylis	17297
Mr. Lametti	17298
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Genuis	17298
Mr. DeCoursey	17298
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Boulерice	17298
Ms. Qualtrough	17298
Indigenous Affairs	
Ms. Sidhu (Brampton South)	17298
Mrs. Philpott	17298
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. McCauley	17298
Ms. Qualtrough	17298
Marijuana	
Ms. Pauzé	17299
Ms. Petitpas Taylor	17299
Taxation	
Ms. Pauzé	17299

Ms. Joly	17299
Business of the House	
Ms. Bergen	17299
Ms. Chagger	17299

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee Governance Agreement Act	
(Bill C-70. On the Order: Government Orders:)	17299
Ms. Chagger	17300
Motion	17300
(Motion agreed to, bill deemed read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)	17300

Business of Supply	
Mr. Strahl	17300
Motion	17300
(Motion agreed to)	17300
Opposition Motion—Veterans Affairs	
Motion	17300
Ms. Ratansi	17300
Mr. Nantel	17301
Mr. Lamoureux	17302
Mrs. Romanado	17302
Mr. Lamoureux	17302
Mr. McCauley	17303
Mr. Stetski	17303
Mr. MacKinnon	17304
Mr. Bezan	17304
Mr. MacKinnon	17305
Ms. Moore	17306
Mrs. McCrimmon	17306
Mrs. Wagantall	17306
Mr. Lamoureux	17308
Mr. Nantel	17308
Mr. Garrison	17308
Ms. Tassi	17310

Mrs. Stubbs	17310
Mr. Blaikie	17311
Ms. Moore	17311
Mr. Hoback	17312
Mr. Lamoureux	17312
Mrs. Boucher	17313
Mr. Lloyd	17313
Mr. Vaughan	17314
Mr. Schiefke	17315
Mr. Nantel	17315
Mr. Maguire	17315
Mrs. Romanado	17316
Ms. Moore	17317
Division deemed demanded and deferred	17317

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Homelessness	
Motion	17317
Mr. Samson	17317
Mrs. Kusie	17318
Ms. Boutin-Sweet	17319
Mr. Vaughan	17321
Mr. Webber	17322
Mr. Johns	17324
Ms. Benson	17325
Division on motion deferred	17326

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Taxation	
Mr. Kmiec	17326
Mr. DeCourcey	17326
Taxation	
Mr. McCauley	17327
Mr. DeCourcey	17328
Health	
Mr. Shields	17329
Mr. DeCourcey	17329

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>