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(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 9, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 9, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Tabling of documents, the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

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DEPARTMENTAL PLANS, 2017-18

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, not just the Speaker, but a member of Parliament from Nova Scotia, of whom we are tremendously proud. I speak on behalf of all Nova Scotians when I say that.

I have the honour to table, in both official languages, on behalf of 83 departments and agencies, the departmental plans for 2017-18.

The Speaker: I thank my fellow native of Hants County for his kind words.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled “Family Reunification”.

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

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party will be attaching a dissenting report to this report because we felt that the report was deficient.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think I will be setting a record today for the number of reports from one committee in one week.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 26th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 26th report later this day.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled “Supplementary Estimates (C), 2016-17: Votes 1c and 5c under Veterans Affairs”.

Also, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled “Main Estimates, 2017-18: Votes 1 and 5 under Veterans Affairs, and Vote 1 under Veterans Review and Appeal Board”.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security concerning Bill C-226, an act to amend the Criminal Code (offences in relation to conveyances) and the Criminal Records Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

[*English*]

The committee has studied the bill, and pursuant to Standing Order 97.1, recommends that the House of Commons not proceed further with the bill.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you will find agreement for the following motion:

Routine Proceedings

That a take note debate on the subject of Operation UNIFIER take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Monday, March 20, 2017, and that, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House: (a) any Member rising to speak during the debate may indicate to the Chair that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another Member; and (b) no quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

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)

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MAIN ESTIMATES, 2017-18

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): The good news continues, Mr. Speaker. There have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you would find agreement for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding the Order made February 23, 2017, to refer Votes 1 and 5 of the Main Estimates for the year 2017-18 of PPP Canada Inc. to the Standing Committee on Finance, the said Votes 1 and 5 be withdrawn from that committee and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

● (1010)

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary 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)

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 26th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find consent for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, March 21st, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member 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)

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PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who stayed at the Holiday Beach campground in Whitefish, Ontario, which is located in the riding of Sudbury.

The petitioners call upon the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time, year-round employees will continue to be recognized and taxed as small businesses.

NEWCOMER SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, newcomer engagement and participation in society has been shown to be an important pillar for upholding our democracy and creating social capital. I proudly present a number of petitions forwarded to me by the multicultural society partnership led by the Okanagan Chinese Canadian Association that call upon the government to support and improve settlement services for newcomers.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise today and present a petition spearheaded by RESULTS Canada and signed by dozens of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, which challenges our government to allocate 0.7% of gross national income towards official development assistance by the year 2020.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from constituents from Richmond and around the Lower Mainland who are opposed to the Kinder Morgan pipeline. They are upset that the Liberals broke their promise in the last election and have now approved this pipeline despite saying they would not do so.

This petition is also accompanied by a pile of letters from students at the Chaffey-Burke Elementary School, who also support the petition.

[*Translation*]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table a petition from residents of the municipality of Lac-Drolet who deplore the fact that an initial petition with 2,200 signatures could not be presented here in the House because it did not meet the requirements. They did their homework, however, and are now presenting a compliant petition to call on the Government of Canada to introduce legislation on cell coverage, so that all regions of Canada are provided with the same level of service as that in medium and large urban centres.

[*English*]

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONFEDERATION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, commemorative medals have been issued by the Government of Canada on significant milestones in the country's history to recognize the contributions of everyday Canadians to their communities. These contributions mean so much to so many, but too often go unnoticed and unacknowledged.

A medal was issued for our Confederation in 1867, the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927, the Centennial in 1967, and the 125th anniversary in 1992. However, as part of the Liberal war on history, there will be no medal honouring the country-building contributions of Canadians on the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The tradition is being ignored and community-leading Canadians are being forgotten.

The petitioners from Wilkie, Saskatchewan, and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, call upon the government to respect tradition and recognize deserving Canadians, and reverse its decision to cancel the commemorative medal for the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1015)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN FORCES TAX BENEFIT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC) moved:

That the House call on the government to show support and appreciation for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces by reversing its

Business of Supply

decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit which provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

He said: I will be sharing my time this morning with my friend and colleague, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Before I get into my comments, I want to extend our condolences to the friends, family, and service members who work as our SAR techs, our search and rescue technicians, for the loss yesterday of Master Corporal Alfred Barr. He was a member of 435 Squadron based out of 17 Wing Winnipeg. Master-Corporal Barr was on a training exercise near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and there was an accident, which is going to be investigated. Our sincerest condolences go to his friends and family.

All of Canada knows that our SAR techs play an important role. They epitomize the bravery of our first responders as they rescue Canadians whether at sea, on land, in our lakes, or in the high Arctic. The 435 Squadron out of Winnipeg goes anywhere and everywhere to save those who need their assistance. It was an unfortunate accident and one that we are very saddened by.

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces are a part of Operation Impact. These troops are stationed in Kuwait and they are part of the fight against ISIS, the terrible terrorist organization that is wreaking havoc across the Middle East and is a threat to us here at home. It came to light to the opposition back in September that these soldiers have had their danger pay taken away from them.

Hardship allowances and danger pay benefits are given to troops when they are deployed and in operation. These troops are putting their lives on the line. Our air force members fly over enemy territory with the support of logistics officers. If it was not for our ground crews getting those planes in the air, whether to do reconnaissance missions, refuelling missions, or out there with our Auroras where the action is and feeding that intelligence to the overall operation, they would not be able to do the job that they do on the ground. It is important that we support these troops.

There is nothing to stop ISIS terrorists from walking across from Iraq and targeting Canadians, Americans, and other allies stationed in Kuwait. We know for a fact that as the fight in Mosul continues, ISIS is on the run. ISIS is being pushed out by Iraqi security forces and the peshmerga with the support of Canadian special operation forces and other allies. As those ISIS rats are fleeing from their holes in Mosul, they are trying to find other places of refuge and Kuwait has become an optimal target for them. We have over 300 Canadian Forces members stationed there.

Business of Supply

It is important that Canadians understand that the hardship and risk allowance these soldiers receive, the tax-free income and bump up in pay, is not just about the risks these soldiers face by being deployed to a theatre of operations. It also takes into consideration the extra hardship that is placed upon their families back home, whether it is their parents, spouses, partners, or kids. They need to have the support because of the extra costs associated with their loved ones not being with them. These soldiers are gone for anywhere from six to eight months at a time and there are extra costs at home associated with things like yard maintenance, house upkeep, taking kids to hockey games, extra babysitting costs. Extra costs that usually do not exist are involved because of one of the spouses being deployed offshore.

This is about fairness. This is about making sure we have the benefits available to support the families who are at home. Without that family support, without that resource for the families, it is hard to find Canadians who want to serve and be deployed for the very reasons that we are talking about today.

Yesterday in the House, the minister was asked a question by the member for Lethbridge. The member asked whether or not there would be retroactive pay for those 15 members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are stationed at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait.

• (1020)

I will quote what the minister said. This is from *Hansard*. He said:

I would also like to correct the member in terms of the previous government's actions on this. It actually sent troops into Kuwait without the tax-free allowance, something we had taken up.

That is the second time the minister has said this, and it is actually in contradiction to what the minister told me in the past in answering questions on the Order Paper. These were questions on the Order Paper that the minister himself has signed. It said we have documents signed and tabled by the minister saying that all Canadian Forces personnel serving at all Operation Impact Kuwait locations received tax relief effective from October 5, 2014, when we put our troops there, right to September 1, 2016, when he took that away from them. The fact is that tax relief was in place for the entire time we were in government.

Peter MacKay, one of our former ministers of defence, said this had come up on a couple of occasions in the past when we had troops in Afghanistan. The hardship panel, which is made up of civil servants from Foreign Affairs, Treasury Board, and National Defence, goes out there and assesses whether there is risk or hardship living conditions for which deployed troops should receive benefits. On the two occasions it came to the attention of Peter MacKay, he said no. He showed leadership. He said troops may not be down in Kandahar, but if they are up in Kabul they are still in harm's way and still supporting operations for our troops that are on the ground. That is leadership when someone just says no. It is a recommendation. It may be a policy decision by the civil service, but the minister always has the ministerial authority to say no, to say we are going to pay our troops equitably and fairly and recognize the danger they are in, in operations, and recognize the hardship their families are facing at home.

This decision took effect after our troops were already deployed, so they went over there on the promise that they were going to

receive the tax breaks and the danger pay. It amounts to more than \$1,500 a month, as high as \$1,800 a month, which they lost after they deployed. They got there, and halfway through deployment, bang, the government made a decision. The minister did not stop it, and the money was taken right out of our troops' pockets, even though they were under the impression they were going to receive danger pay when they were at Camp Arifjan.

Family members started reaching out to us. It was first brought to our attention on September 2. One family member wrote that this treatment of our service men and women is embarrassing. Military life is exceptionally challenging: her husband makes far less money as a civil engineer in the army than he could in the private sector; their lifestyle is very unstable as they move often; and as he is regularly away for months at a time, her ability to build a career has been sacrificed because they are rarely in the same city for more than three years, and their ability to start a family has been inhibited again and again by the fact that her partner is away for extended periods of time.

She goes on to say that they choose this lifestyle anyway because they are passionate about Canada, a country worth working for, worth continuing to strengthen and build and worth sacrifice; and that to have someone pass a policy that impacts her family in such an essential manner without taking into consideration the implications on the families who readily sacrifice is shocking and disconcerting.

That was the first time we had outreach. Then more family members started reaching out to us in November, because it had not been repealed. They had reached out to Liberal members of Parliament and were getting no replies and no action. They continued to express their concerns that they were out of pocket and they were not getting what was promised to them when they deployed. One family member was told by the MP to go ahead and complain, that no one in Canada cares about them. That is disgusting. That was through one of the local newspapers.

These soldiers in Kuwait, in Camp Arifjan, deserve to be paid, not just have the danger pay reinstated, but retroactively reinstated right to September 1, when they were promised they would receive that pay when they were deployed.

• (1025)

On November 10, I wrote a letter to the minister. I tried to go through the appropriate route to see if he would address it. I did not receive a reply back from the minister. I then raised it with General Vance, the chief of the defence staff, when we were sitting at committee on November 15. I raised it with the minister at committee on December 1, and I still have not received a reply. Here we are today debating it, with no action from the government. I demand that the government retroactively reinstate the danger pay for all of our troops in Kuwait before it makes it an even bigger problem by taking away the danger pay from all of the 300 members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are stationed in Kuwait today.

Business of Supply

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to add my comments to those of the member across the way when he made reference to the passing of Alfred Barr. The 435 search and rescue squadron was the squadron I belonged to when I served in the Canadian Forces, and I am very familiar with the sense of commitment that squadron has to the need for training, and to serve Canada as well as it does. Therefore, on behalf of the government, I express our condolences to the family and friends of 435 squadron.

I understand what the member across the way is saying. This is a government that genuinely cares about the Canadian Forces. We have seen significant investments made in upgrades to provide what our forces need for modern-day exercises.

My question for the member is this. Would he acknowledge that there is a sense of obligation that we have with our current Minister of National Defence, with his history, and the many members of this caucus? He made a comment that someone had complained to a member of Parliament and that the response from the member of Parliament was to go ahead and complain because no one really cares about it. I do not believe that any member—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members that there is only five minutes for questions and comments. Therefore, members are asked to keep their questions short, because we have to allow other people to also ask questions.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I want to say to the member for Winnipeg North that it could have been a paraphrase in a newspaper based on discussions with local MPs.

However, at the same time, if the government cares about the men and women who are serving in the Armed Forces, it should support them and their families with the proper pay. It is unbelievable that there are members who sit on the other side in the government who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces and who are not out there advocating to correct this wrong. All members who serve, especially when deployed in operations, deserve to have the full suite of benefits provided to them as hardship pay and allowances. That danger pay is necessary not only for their own personal well-being and recognition of the sacrifice and danger that they are facing, but in support of the military families at home, the enablers of our men and women in uniform.

Therefore, I have to say this. The member should do the right thing: put his mouth to the ear of the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of National Defence, and the Minister of Finance, reverse this terrible decision, and support our troops, because they are in harm's way because of the high terrorist threat activity that exists in Kuwait.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am always concerned when we get to a point where we are politicizing the treatment of people in our troops. I am sure that, despite the differences that are being expressed, all members of this House believe that we need to provide the troops the support, the training, and the equipment they need to do the difficult and dangerous work we ask them to do every day on our behalf.

However, I have to say that I always take a bit of pleasure in seeing the Liberals and Conservatives debating who did the worse job on this. The point has to be not who did the worse job but whether we will provide not just the danger pay in the field but the supports the troops need when they get back, the supports the families need when people return home with PTSD, the supports our veterans deserve, and the supports in making that transition to civilian life. Therefore, while the Conservatives may call out the Liberals on this particular point, there is a lot for all of us to answer for in the way we treat the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who serve us so well.

•(1030)

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, my friend from the NDP and I serve together on the defence committee, and we do a lot of TV panels together. He has used that line before: who actually did a worse job. I can say that, when the Conservatives were in power, we never let this happen. When the Conservatives were in power, every single member who was deployed—whether it was to Afghanistan, to Operation Impact, or serving in operations anywhere else in the world that have danger associated with them—received the full suite of benefits. They received the tax reductions and the increased salaries of \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month in their pockets for their families. That is leadership. That is something I am proud of that we did as a government, and it is something that is lacking from the current government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I first want to thank my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, who is not only an expert on defence matters, but also an authority on parliamentary procedure and a resource for newer members, such as myself. I admire him a great deal.

I would like to point out to anyone who may not already know that I spent most of my working life in the Canadian Forces. I was a reservist for 22 years. I commanded the Régiment de la Chaudière. I was also deployed to Cyprus under the UN flag, I participated in a NATO mission, and I taught at the École militaire in Paris. The world of the Canadian Forces is a world I know very well; I grew up in it.

I have also seen the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform whose hearts are in the right place and who put their lives on the line in service of Canada to protect us and defend our values. I am one of their own. I am also a veteran.

Something else that is not well known outside the forces is that soldiers do not really have any input in the decision-making process. Once they are given an order, they have no choice but to follow through. They cannot say a word. A soldier is not unionized and does not have the right to reply. They have to take it or leave it. It is all or nothing, as the saying goes.

When soldiers are told that they are going to be deployed to the Middle East on a mission like Operation Impact to fight ISIS, they take a deep breath and go. They have no choice. That is how it goes.

Business of Supply

In many cases, the soldier is the main, if not the sole, breadwinner in the family. Soldiers are often transferred from one base to another across the country, and it is very hard for the spouses to get work in their field. For every Canadian soldier deployed overseas there is a Canadian household that has to get by with one less person. It is challenging. I commend spouses of soldiers deployed overseas.

Our soldiers are not the only ones who make major sacrifices. Their spouses do too. Couples are separated for months, and soldiers' spouses do not know whether their partner will return from the mission or not. Now they have an additional source of stress: will they be able to make ends meet at the end of the month? When this cut is added to the rising energy bills in some provinces, I can completely understand why my brothers and sisters in arms and their spouses are stressed.

When we consider all of these factors, we can understand our soldiers' resentment and contempt. They are serving abroad in the fight against ISIS, a group that wants to put an end to the world as we know it, and their pay is being cut by up to \$1,800 a month. The government is stabbing our soldiers in the back.

The Liberals waited until the soldiers had been deployed to announce that they would no longer be entitled to those benefits, but it gets worse. By withdrawing our CF-18s from the fight against ISIS terrorists and increasing the land component of the mission, the Liberals put our troops at increased risk. Now, the government is taking away the danger pay of soldiers deployed to dangerous areas.

I would also remind members that our partners in the alliance, the other countries fighting with us against ISIS, often share the same facilities with Canadians, which is a financial benefit to them because they have not had cuts.

The mission is then dangerous enough for an American soldier, but not for a Canadian soldier. This double standard shows just how much this Liberal government cares about our men and women in uniform. I would also like to point out that we have raised this issue with the minister several times.

My colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman wrote to him last November to point out the egregious consequences of this decision. We also brought this issue to the Standing Committee on National Defence when the minister was testifying on the supplementary estimates. His only response was to ask his chief of the defence staff to look into it. For the minister, looking after our soldiers and their well-being means letting a subordinate deal with the issue.

How are the Liberals planning to fix the problem? By cutting compensation paid to all deployed soldiers. Apparently the Minister of National Defence does not have a lot of influence in cabinet. He has so little, in fact, that as of June, none of our soldiers will be entitled to danger pay. That will be cut off in June. None of the Operation Impact soldiers will be entitled to it. For crying out loud. That makes no sense.

Indeed, the minister is so powerful that, in September, he was unable to reverse the decision to cut the monthly pay and benefits of soldiers stationed at Camp Arifjan by \$1,800. That is shameful. I am ashamed of this because it shows a lack of respect for our soldiers.

When we were in power, we made a point of simplifying the process to determine which benefits soldiers were entitled to before they were deployed. Soldiers sent to fight ISIS collected benefits for participating in a dangerous mission because they were entitled. All of our soldiers except those stationed in Qatar have been receiving danger-related benefits since the mission began. Where there is a will, there is a way.

• (1035)

If the Liberals do not believe me, they should listen to their own minister. He confirmed this himself in writing in part (h) of his response to Question No. 600:

All Canadian Armed Forces personnel serving at all Operation IMPACT Kuwait locations received Tax Relief effective 5 Oct 2014...to 1 Sept 2016.

All soldiers involved in the Iraqi deployment received this benefit. The minister therefore misled the House when he said that soldiers sent into Kuwait did not receive danger pay from the beginning of the mission. We have to wonder whether he is trying to hide his own incompetence or that of his colleagues.

This whole affair and these explanations leave me with one question in mind: who in this government is comfortable taking benefits away from our soldiers sent to the Middle East? We know that someone was comfortable with this decision, but we still do not know who. If this was a nuisance, this problem could have been solved relatively quickly, but that does not seem to be the case.

For months, the minister has been saying that he has tasked the chief of the defence staff with reviewing the matter. For months, all our deployed troops have lost their benefits. I will come back to my initial question: who, within this government is comfortable with this decision?

The Prime Minister has been awfully quiet on this. Is he comfortable with this decision? After all, the well-being of our troops seems to be the least of his concerns. He seems more interested in flying in Italian helicopters to visit the Aga Khan than concerning himself with our troops, who have the right to be treated fairly. This says a lot about the Prime Minister's priorities.

What about our millionaire Minister of Finance who is on a spending spree, a man of endless deficits, a man with money? Actually, he does not really have any money because it is future generations who will pay. These people do not care about that.

I do not understand how the government can be so despicable to Canadians who are fighting to eradicate ISIS. As Brian Mulroney said about apartheid, the Liberals are on the wrong side of history on this issue and will eventually be judged for their lack of respect.

Who is responsible for this lack of respect? Who thought it was the right decision to cut the benefits of our soldiers who have been sent on a mission to combat ISIS? Was it the Minister of Public Services and Procurement? She loves our troops so much, that she is happy to bleed our armed forces dry by forcing them to buy an interim fleet of outdated Super Hornets that the Royal Canadian Air Force does not need. That decision is going to cripple us for decades to come.

Business of Supply

This government's motto seems to be to do less with more. The government is showing a blatant lack of respect for our men and women in uniform.

The reality is that every government member, from the first to the last, is responsible for this appalling situation. We need not look very far to understand why our armed forces are having so much trouble recruiting. Why would anyone want to work for an employer that cuts the salary of its employees after sending them halfway around the world to a place where many people want nothing more than to see them dead? That is what a Liberal government is.

Thanks to the previous government, the troops deployed throughout the Middle East, except those in Qatar, received a tax cut while they were deployed. At some point, the Liberals will have to explain to the children of this country what they have done and tell them that this was the best they could do.

I empathize with our troops and their spouses, who must now live with an unexpected pay cut. I am ashamed of Canada because of this government. I hope that the Liberals will wake up and fix this. If they do not, we will know for sure that they absolutely do not care about our men and women in uniform.

• (1040)

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He is evidently very familiar with this subject, and I commend him for sharing his knowledge with us. He is quite right to say that we cannot change the working conditions of someone who travelled far away to work in a danger zone. Naturally, we agree with him.

However, I remind him that it, even though he was not a member at the time, his party's government misled us by stating that it was not a dangerous mission and that it was sending soldiers there to provide support and training. That was a serious mistake, and the mission was underfunded.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Even though I was not here at the time, we have always considered this mission to be dangerous. We sent our CF-18s to conduct air strikes and support other air forces. We were in a combat mission and that was clear to us.

It is true that the special forces deployed there were on a training mission. However, they were nonetheless deployed to a theatre of operations which we always considered to be a war zone. There was never any doubt about the level of danger and our troops received danger pay from the start.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, my distinguished colleague has a unique perspective in that he has been a reservist in Canada's Armed Forces. I am wondering if he would share with the House the additional burdens that are borne by reservists, who not only leave their families but their regular, often better paying, jobs to serve our country.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

No matter where in the world a reservist or a member of the regular forces is deployed, the family and those left behind go through a great deal of stress. Of course, the Canadian Forces can help out, but being separated from one's family for six months and often more is extremely stressful. The financial benefits are there to ease the burden.

These folks do not have the same salaries we have. They might earn \$50,000, \$60,000, or maybe \$70,000 a year. When they are deployed, at least they earn this financial benefit and can tell their family that they can splurge a bit in life and that this extra income will help them.

As I said in my speech, the spouses who stay home can rarely get a job to earn extra money because soldiers are often deployed all across Canada. These benefits do not cost the government much and they go a long way to putting our troops' minds at ease.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I too would like to pass on my condolences to Master Corporal Barr's family and 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron. In fact, I actually visited the squadron not too long ago. This is actually a second loss for them, within two years of losing Sergeant Mark Salesse, who I personally served with in the same regiment.

Other members have mentioned the work our search and rescue technicians do. I can assure this House and Canadians that our SAR techs are the special forces of the search and rescue community. There are only a few who ever get selected to perform that role.

I rise to address the hon. member's motion for debate on hardship and risk allowances for members of the Canadian Armed Forces. I want to reassure Canadians that the safety and welfare of our women and men in uniform is among the government's top priorities. This is why I made this a priority in the defence policy review.

We do everything in our power to keep our personnel safe here at home and overseas. As someone who has served in a theatre of operations, I can attest to the extraordinary work of our personnel. I care about our members serving in Kuwait. After visiting them, it was clear that we needed to ensure that they are well cared for and compensated for the work they do.

Business of Supply

I just want to make clear again that during my visit to Kuwait, within approximately a month of becoming the Minister of National Defence, our troops at Ali Al Salem Air Base did not have tax-free status. It was only in February 2016, when I came back, that we were able to work together with my colleagues, who also care about making sure our troops are well cared for, to get approval for the tax-free allowance. I want to correct some of the members. Our troops did not have tax-free status when they were actually deployed for that operation. It was in February 2016, after my visit to Kuwait.

To my surprise, there is an interdepartmental committee, based on rules set out and changed back in 2014, that had decreased some of the risk allowance. As I told the members in a letter dated February 8, not only did we share their concerns, but there were actions we were looking at taking, and we were happy to discuss it in person, as well. That was dated February 8, 2017. I have a copy of the letter here.

That is why I have been very much engaged on this issue and personally engaged in today's motion. We support the motion related to Canadian Forces members at Camp Arifjan, who were deployed when the risk level was adjusted.

Furthermore, our government is working towards effective compensation for all our troops on deployed missions. That is why I have asked the chief of the defence staff to review our approach to risk assessment and the way those payments are implemented, and I will provide details to our members when they are available.

I appreciate the opportunity to also underline how proud we are of the operational excellence of our military. Canadian servicemen and women have a long and proud tradition of performing valiantly when duty calls. Our soldiers forged their reputation as formidable fighters on the western front during World War I. Canadian troops took part in most of the major battles waged from April 1915 to November 1918, helping to secure the allies' victory.

They repeated this valour in World War II, which saw more than one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders serve in the military. More than 45,000 gave their lives, and another 55,000 were wounded. For a country of just 11 million people at that time, Canada's contribution was remarkable.

Most recently, Canadian troops proved their mettle in the first Gulf War, another important chapter in Canada's history. More than 4,000 Canadian Armed Forces personnel served in the Persian Gulf as part of the international coalition of countries that forced the invading forces of Iraq from neighbouring Kuwait.

● (1045)

Our brave service men and women also made their mark this century battling terrorism and helping bring democracy to Afghanistan. The mission involved over 40,000 of our personnel, the largest deployment since the Second World War. The Canadian Forces' critical role in various wars has put Canada on the world stage, earning the respect and admiration of our allies and opposing forces alike. So too has our unwavering determination to keep the peace. More than 26,000 Canadians answered the call of a newly formed United Nations to help maintain international peace and security in Korea in the early 1950s. Canadians have taken part in repeated peacekeeping missions ever since, from the Suez Canal to the Sinai

and Cyprus to Bosnia and Somalia. Time and again, Canadian Armed Forces members have been willing to put their lives at risk, whether courageously defending our country's values or contributing to international peace and security.

This proud heritage carries on today as the world community continues to look to the Canadian Armed Forces in times of need. Our current operations around the globe reinforce that the Canadian Armed Forces does not let countries in a crisis down.

I can point to our personnel's work in the Middle East. This includes Operation Artemis, our counterterrorism and maritime security operations across the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean.

For Operation Impact, Canada's contribution to the Middle East stabilization force, the multinational coalition to degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh, the Canadian Armed Forces has deployed some 830 highly skilled personnel to conduct air operations, provide training and assistance to Iraqi security forces, increase the capabilities of regional forces, and provide medical services to the coalition forces. As of March 6, the Aurora has surveyed some 5,300 points of interest while the Polaris aircraft has delivered some 40.5 million pounds of fuel to coalition aircraft. This is what our Canadian Armed Forces personnel contribute.

Then there is Operation Frequence in the Sahel region. The Royal Canadian Air Force has a C-17 Globemaster that provides strategic airlift support to France, an important ally to us. It moves personnel and equipment from France to West Africa in the Sahel region to combat Daesh. The Canadian Armed Forces conducted its third flight under Operation Frequence late last month.

Of course, there is Canada's commitment to Operation Reassurance in eastern Europe. The Canadian Armed Forces has about 450 deployed personnel and a navy frigate in central and eastern Europe as part of NATO assurance and deterrence measures. This month, about 200 members of the Operation Reassurance land task force are participating in a multinational exercise, Allied Spirit VI, in Germany. Canadian troops will train closely with our NATO allies and partners to enhance the ability of military forces in Europe to work together. In addition to an infantry company, the LTF is providing logistics and medical support to this exercise.

Earlier this week, along with my colleague from foreign affairs, I announced the extension of Operation Unifier, our military training mission to Ukraine, until the end of March 2019. Just about 200 Canadian Armed Forces members will continue to support the professional development of the Ukrainian armed forces through a range of training activities. We also will enhance strategic institutional reform of Ukraine's defence establishment. It is clear that our outstanding Canadian troops can be counted on to do their part, wherever called on and whatever the risk.

Business of Supply

Generation after generation of Canadians have tackled missions facing great risk. Risk is an inherent part of the important jobs that our forces members do on behalf of Canada and Canadians. Therefore risk assessment is not a process we take lightly. As I have previously stated, I have directed the chief of the defence staff, General Vance, to launch a comprehensive review of the rules around tax-free relief for military personnel. It will make recommendations about when and how best to administer the hardship allowance and risk allowance when we send our troops abroad. The highly political approach that the opposition has taken to this issue may give Canadians a false impression that our Canadian men and women are demanding more money in exchange, but this is not the case. Our women and men chose to sacrifice a great deal in order to serve their country. We want to honour that spirit of sacrifice to ensure we have a fair, transparent compensating system for them.

These are the problems that the member opposite had not fixed over the last 10 years. The Conservatives had an opportunity to do so, but they did not.

•(1050)

No less than 15 times in 2013 did Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Chris Alexander, and Peter MacKay promise to fix this problem, and here we are today cleaning up this mess. For 10 years, the Conservatives' lack of investment in the Canadian Armed Forces has left us with this problem. That is one of the reasons why, as part of the defence policy review, we looked at this. I asked my colleagues on the other side to work together on this so we can come up with ideas. If there are any ideas we may not have thought of, we would be able to work together. I am always open to do so and I will always continue to do so. I asked members to continue to work together and this has not been the case.

The hardship and risk for all operations must be reviewed, not just one. We want to make sure that all operations are reviewed. They must reflect the actual conditions and dangers people are exposed to in specific geographic regions and on specific operations. These levels fluctuate as the risks and hardships associated with members' roles change over time, the distinctions that can alter a member's pay and associated tax implications. The safety and security of our men and women on operations are part of a much bigger picture.

When we talk about assessing risk, we are really talking about how we care for our military family. That includes members' support networks and the families and friends who look after them. Members of the military can only perform well if they know their families are supported in their communities while they are away. Their families' welfare is critical to soldiers' peace of mind as they take on overseas assignments. I can attest to this myself.

The Canadian Armed Forces recognize the many contributions of military families and their vital role in sustaining our personnel. That is why the military family services program and the joint personnel support unit are there to keep families strong and resilient. The tools and services they offer address the various dimensions of military families' lives: physical, mental, emotional, and financial. The Canadian Armed Forces also provide access to a broad range of social support networks and professional counselling to aid families

of ill, injured, or fallen because we want families to be in the best possible position to support serving members and each other.

It is difficult for people outside the forces to understand the strain on military families. One of the biggest issues they deal with is frequent moves. The government tries to offset the financial hardship that comes with moving under the Canadian Forces integrated relocation program. It provides multiple benefits to military families to pay for their relocation. As well, cost of living adjustments that reflect the realities of financial life in new locations help families when our members are on operations.

Another challenge many family members face is receiving health care as they move across country. Families of active military members do not receive medical care through the Canadian Armed Forces. Only Canadian Armed Forces members receive it. Their families depend on services provided by the provincial and territorial health care systems. They count on family physicians to make space for them in their practices, freeing up a spot, when one military family is posted, to make way for another. I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of interest and support by community leaders anxious to rally behind our serving members and their families.

The Canadian Armed Forces' military family services team benefits from the backing of groups like The College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian military and veteran families leadership circle, The Vanier Institute of the Family, and the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research. My wife is a family doctor and she, too, has been part of this, making sure that she educates other doctors on the challenges of military families so they take more military families into their practices.

The Canadian Armed Forces has joined forces with these organizations to develop educational tools for health practitioners across the country. For instance, I recently helped to launch the "Family Physicians Working with Military Families" physician guide. It was developed to give physicians insight into the challenges facing military families to help doctors provide compassionate and patient-centred care. This will go a long way to ensuring members' families receive the support and services they need.

Equally important is caring for loved ones returning from military missions. Transitioning back to civilian life is often difficult, especially when a member is ill or injured. The Canadian Armed Forces work with Veterans Affairs to improve services for ill and injured military members, veterans, and their families. We are currently looking at what more needs to be done as part of the defence policy review. The Canadian Armed Forces also provide leadership in the area of mental health. We have made significant investments to help people at risk for mental health problems to provide them the assistance they need.

Business of Supply

●(1055)

There is no question that we live in challenging and risk-filled times. Just as there can be no doubt about the bravery, commitment, and sacrifice of members of the Canadian Armed Forces who take those challenges on, there is also no doubt that those who dedicate their lives to keeping our values and sovereignty secure deserve the best services, the best care, and the best support possible to help them do their jobs.

Our government's response to the motion before us today reinforces that we all agree that the men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces deserve the best. Neither can there be any debate that this government is committed to supporting our troops, aviators, and sailors, both here at home and wherever they are deployed around the world. Care for forces members is a priority for our government, for our Prime Minister, and for me. We work to keep our service personnel and their families safe and secure wherever their job takes them.

I urge all parties to join us as we support our women and men in uniform, however they serve and wherever the operations might take them.

●(1100)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the points I agree with the defence minister on is the outstanding record of Canada's Armed Forces. Indeed, I would argue that over the last 200 years nobody has had a better record of standing up for what is right in this world than the people of the Canadian Armed Forces. This is why it is so important to not just talk about supporting them or supporting the spirit of our Armed Forces, we have to do something about it.

First, I would like him to correct what he said yesterday, that what we generally refer to as the "danger pay" for troops in Kuwait was not in place under the previous administration. In fact, it was. This was pointed out by my colleague, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. I wish he would correct that and I would ask him to do that.

The other thing is, does he not understand, and would he not agree with me, that it is within the jurisdiction, it is within the ability of the defence minister to make this decision to reinstate danger pay for the people in Kuwait? They deserve it. That is part of that support that we give to our members of our Armed Forces. He says he wants to have a comprehensive review. Skip the comprehensive review. Why do we not just do it? Let us do the right thing for them.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, I cannot change reality. When I visited the troops, they did not have a tax-free allowance. When I came back it was not a political issue. We came back and got the process started. It had not gone through the process. When I came back, I spoke with my colleague, the finance minister, and we were able to get it approved in February 2016, which is a good.

There was an interdepartmental committee with rules that were revised in 2014, which assessed the risk allowance every year. Once the assessment was made, the determination was made to reduce these benefits. When I was informed of this, I immediately took action to have this policy reviewed so that we not only look at supporting our members in the Canadian Armed Forces who are

serving in Kuwait but that we actually take a broader view so that we do not get into the same situation again, so that we can look at it for everything that we do. That is what the defence policy review is doing.

Yes, we are working toward fixing this for Kuwait, but also we are looking at it more broadly, as well.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am tempted, now that we have agreement on this motion to ask to see the clock at 5:30, but I think there are some other things we could discuss on this important topic of support to our troops, or we could, perhaps at some point in this Parliament, talk about the new defence strategy, whether it will be presented to Parliament or whether we will get a chance to debate it.

However, what I am going to ask the minister about is something that came up at a veterans forum that was hosted on March 2 at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 91, in Langford, by the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford and myself, and attended by our veterans critic, the member for London—Fanshawe. My question is about transition. After they come home from having been on dangerous missions abroad and they decide to leave the forces, there is a big gap that happens between leaving the forces and actually being able to collect their pensions, which leaves many members of our forces with no income for literally months on end.

I am hoping that in the upcoming budget the minister has made provisions for adequate staffing so we can end problems like this that occur when members have come home, after serving their country so well, and end up in a situation where they have no income while they wait for their pensions.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with the member opposite. We need to ensure we have enough personnel to process this information so when our members choose to retire, they can get their pensions in a reasonable manner. We have had certain people in to reduce the amount within the last year, and we have done this significantly. However, it is still not enough. That is one of the reasons why I have people in my office looking at emergency situations. When someone has needed a pension cheque, at times we have had a turnaround time within 17 hours.

However, this is a much bigger issue. As part of the defence policy review, we have looked at this not just for pensions and not just once they are injured, but how we help them retire healthy as well. I look forward to announcing this once the final decision on defence policy is made. Good consultation has been made with experts and also with members opposite. I look forward to discussing that further.

●(1105)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the minister for taking the time to be in the House today to talk about this serious situation and about getting it rectified. I also want to thank the member for Niagara Falls who is a former minister of national defence and understands the ministerial authority that the minister has in stopping these types of decisions from happening.

Business of Supply

I have asked the minister if he would correct the record based on question period yesterday, and now that he has risen. He has said that this happened when Conservatives were in government. I have Question No. 600 on the Order Paper, signed by the minister and tabled in here, to answer my question I raised about Operation Impact. Under his pen, he said:

All Canadian Armed Forces personnel serving at all Operation IMPACT Kuwait locations received Tax Relief effective 5 Oct 2014 (date at which the original risk scores became effective) to 1 Sep 2016. As of September 1, 2016, new assigned risk levels of section 1.78(2) came into effect for the Al Jaber and Arifjan locations; therefore as of that date, these two locations lost their Tax Relief Status.

Could the minister reverse it and make it retroactive, reinstate all danger pay, all tax relief for all our troops that are in Kuwait and ensure this does not happen again? I understand the minister is doing a policy review, but will he ensure that everyone who is deployed in the fight in support of the fight against ISIS gets the pay and benefits they deserve?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, in February 2016, when I was able to get the tax-free allowance approved once the finance minister signed off on it, I too was surprised when the decision was made by the committee to change the risk assessment. The assessment was made some time ago. Now that I have learned about this, I have taken direct action. I directed the chief of the defence staff to look at this, not just for Kuwait and fixing this problem, but also in a much wider form as well.

We are committed to looking at Operation Impact and even broader than that.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, again, I am glad to hear the minister is taking action on this question. I also am glad to hear we can agree on the obvious, that Canadian troops need support when they are doing difficult and dangerous work. However, again, I would like to see us at some point in the House grapple with those larger issues. Therefore, I have a specific question for the minister about the defence policy review, which he says would tackle some of these questions.

Will that review be presented either to the House of Commons defence committee or to the House for debate?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, as with anything we do in government, it is going through the cabinet process now for final approval and a decision is made how this will be discussed with parliamentarians and also Canadians at large. We did very thorough consultations and we need to ensure we demonstrate to Canadians that they were heard, as well as all the experts and the various parties that provided input. There will be ample opportunity, and I look forward to discussing this personally with my critics as well.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, unfortunately we are seeing is a pattern where the Liberals point to comprehensive reviews that are happening as a way of excusing a lack of action on individual areas. There is certainly a time and need for a comprehensive review, but that does not exclude taking action immediately in a case in which it is required. We have seen this on the justice file and we see it on the defence file.

In the midst of that review, could the minister commit to taking action right now on something of particular urgency and that can be addressed immediately?

● (1110)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, the member talks about taking action. Within months of being named minister of national defence, I visited our troops. In a town hall. I found out that our troops, which were doing that great work, did not have tax-free status. I made a phone call. When I came back, I spoke to the chief of defence staff, and we had the Minister of Finance sign off on the approval, on February 2016, to get the tax-free allowance for them.

However, we also need to do a comprehensive review so we will not get into these situations again. It is important to look at the longer-term picture, and that is what we are committed to do.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for North Island—Powell River.

In the course of debate so far this morning, I have already had a chance to make some of the points I was going to make at the outset of this speech, and I will repeat them at this point. I am very glad to hear that all sides of the House are prepared to support the motion, which does the obvious. It commits us to provide the support Canadian troops need when they are in the field doing difficult and dangerous work.

I am sorry it has become a bit of a political football, but the good part we can take out of that is that we have a commitment from the minister to act, and I hope that has been accepted in good faith on the Conservative side.

What we do internationally as Canadians is almost always part of a larger partnership. I was privileged to be part of the defence committee trip to Washington, D.C. this week. We talked about those partnerships and how those operated. One of the things we accomplished was to remind Americans of the Canadian-American partnership and to let them know there was concern in Canada about the fact that there may be inadvertent damage to Canadian-American defence co-operation and our defence relations by some of the wilder statements that had been made by the President in his campaign, and some of the things that continued to be said. In all good faith, I do not think they were really directed at Canada, but they may have those negative impacts.

Yesterday we had the great privilege of meeting with Senator John McCain, a meeting that went on for quite a long time. I think we managed to get across the fact that we could not allow our existing partnerships to be disrupted by wild talk about America first. Not only is Canada the main export market in trade for 35 states, but also on the defence industries, we have such melded industries where supply chains go back and forth across the border. America first in defence has always meant America co-operating with Canada, and we have to keep that co-operation in place.

Business of Supply

We met with Senator Reid, who is the ranking Democrat on the Senate armed services committee. We were able to talk to him about defence jobs that would be lost in his riding if we disrupted the Canada-American defence production relationships by, again, this wild rhetoric about American first on jobs. The production chains are so integrated in Canada and the United States.

We also met with five representatives. I think one of the biggest surprises for them was when we talked about the number of immigrants in Canada and how our foreign born population was much larger than that in the United States. Again, we raised the inadvertent problems sometimes caused for Canadians who wanted to do business in the United States when the United States talked about securing its borders. I have examples from my riding of people involved in the high-tech industry who were born outside of Canada. They are trying to go back and forth to San Francisco to do their business work and they have been affected, I think, inadvertently. I do not think the President really aimed at these people, but he has caused great problems for them.

When we talk about Canadians serving abroad, as we are in this very narrow motion, we have to remember that has always been in a larger partnership, whether it is with the United States, in this case, in the Middle East, or whether it is through the United Nations in other cases, or through NATO.

Part of what we also discussed was the President's very firm insistence on a 2% GDP spending to be a good partner, self-defined by the U.S., in NATO. We were able to point out that when the United States asked Canada, we showed up in force with very professional soldiers. We showed up with people who knew how to do the difficult work they were asked to do.

One of the things we were also trying to get across was that when we talked about the current mission in the Middle East, Canadians had played a very important role in that mission, and that needed to be remembered in this discussion of relationships.

I am casting a bit broadly here because it is important that the House spends more time talking about the importance of defence and the importance of Canada's international role, particularly in this time when the U.S. President's policies are somewhat erratic, not always well thought out, especially when they are expressed in tweets.

It is very important that Canada act as a force for stability. To do that, it is very important that we have Canadian forces ready and available to serve on these international missions. This means having the training available, doing the recruitment needed, having the equipment needed, and having the support for those troops, both in the field and when they come home.

• (1115)

One of the things we heard from the American side is that they sometimes now question, just as they do for their own forces, their readiness. Have we actually spent enough time making sure that our forces are ready to deploy? Do they have the training? Do they have the equipment? Do they have the munitions? Are we able to transport them into the theatre of operations.

We focused on a very narrow part of this today in the motion, which is whether we are providing adequate compensation to those

with difficult and dangerous work, but there is the broader question of how well we are preparing Canadians to take on those roles as part of international partnerships.

I was very proud to be part of that delegation. I think we can congratulate ourselves, rightly, in saying that what we did as a committee was represent Canada in Washington, D.C. and not represent the parties we might represent here in the House. The fact that our meeting with Senator McCain was originally scheduled for half an hour, and at that point he said it was an important meeting and extended the meeting for another half hour, indicated the importance of getting our message across to the Americans that this is an important partnership, that we intend to do our bit, and that we intend to show up when asked.

We are going to have to follow that up on our side with a budget that increases military spending. We were able to say that for once in the House we have a consensus among all the parties that we are not spending enough on those readiness functions. We are not spending enough to make sure that our military is properly equipped. There is more work to do here.

I look forward to seeing the Liberal budget and seeing what progress we are going to make toward that goal of 2% of GDP spending, arbitrary though it is.

When it comes to talking to those in my riding who serve, there is still some reluctance among those in the Canadian Forces to talk to me, as an opposition member, about what is going on, but I have to say that the atmosphere has gotten a lot better on those grounds. People do come forward and talk about the gaps they see in preparedness.

We all know, certainly with the submarine deal we had, that it took us a long time to get those submarines ready. We spent an inordinate amount of money preparing them to serve as part of these joint missions, but they are now ready. They can now serve and are now an important part of what we can contribute to those international coalitions and obligations.

The one part I am concerned about and that my party is concerned about is that one of the traditional things we always did as part of these partnerships, and which was very dangerous work, was peacekeeping work. We had a commitment almost a year ago from the minister that Canada would once again take up peacekeeping work in Africa. This would be another case when our troops would clearly be entitled to fair compensation to take on what would be very difficult missions. It is something the Americans are interested in us doing, as they said very clearly to us in the past few days when we were at the Pentagon, the Senate, or the House of Representatives.

Business of Supply

There are some things we can do that the Americans cannot do. Some of those things are very difficult and dangerous, but they may be a little less difficult and dangerous for us as Canadians than they would be for Americans. One of those is peacekeeping, because of Canada's lack of an external colonial past. Despite the internal colonial past we have, we did not have colonies abroad. Another of those is the capabilities we have as a bilingual country with the ability to put forward forces that can work in both English and French. It is particularly important to be able to work in French in Africa.

We have to get this right if we are going to ask our members of the Canadian Forces to go do those jobs, which I believe we should ask them to do. We have to make sure they have the training, the equipment, the compensation, and the support in place before we send them to do this difficult work. I guess my disappointment with today's debate is that we are solving the problem of how we compensate them after they are in the field. I do not want to see us do that again in a future mission. I want to see this sorted out. I take the minister seriously that he is going to sort out this problem. I look forward to seeing in his budget whether we have the resources to actually send Canadians to play an important role as a counterweight to the Americans in this difficult and dangerous world.

● (1120)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the role my colleague, as the NDP defence critic, plays on the national defence committee. I also appreciate his comments that even though we are all very partisan here in the House, when we go abroad, as we did in Washington, we go as team Canada. We concentrate on the issues that unite us as parliamentarians, driving home the message about how important the Canada-U.S. relationship is and especially how we can work together in defence co-operation with our American friends, allies, and family members who live down there. I appreciate his words.

I also take the minister at his word that he is reviewing the policy on the way they do the evaluation of hardship risk pay and benefits for our troops. However, the real question, and I do not believe the member addressed it in his comments, is his position on making sure that this payment is retroactive for those who are currently serving in theatre and have been denied this benefit since September 1, 2016.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the spirit of co-operation his party showed on our mission to Washington, D.C. and the very valuable contribution he makes to debate on defence issues in the House.

At the end of my remarks I said that we are far better off solving these problems before we send Canadians on these difficult and dangerous missions. We cannot expect them to go not knowing what situation they will be in with respect to compensation, because it has a big impact on their families.

Obviously, the minister has some work to do before we send troops to Latvia, which, again, we have all-party support for doing, but let us make sure they know what they and their families can count on before they go on that mission. The same would be true before we take on an African peacekeeping mission. Let us make sure we get these problems solved before we send Canadians abroad.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a specific question of the minister in regard to the hardship committee we established that does the risk assessment and hardship adjustment. I am sure the member is somewhat familiar with it. When members of the Canadian Forces are deployed to an international venue, that is when the committee evaluates the hardship and risk factors.

I am wondering if the member could comment on how he would see the NDP supporting something in advance, when there is often a request before we can do a robust investigation of the many different factors on site. I am a bit confused as to how the NDP would see that work. I wonder if the member could expand on that.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for my promotion to minister at the beginning of his question.

What I would say is the same thing I have been saying. The purpose of having a policy on hardship pay, or danger pay, as everyone in the forces calls it, is that it is known in advance. Before we send missions out, we evaluate the dangers. That is done before we put people in the field. Is it sometimes revised later because of changing circumstances? Absolutely. That is necessary, but there is no case I know of where the Canadian Forces have been sent abroad without that kind of evaluation being done before they go. It is part of the planning for any mission.

That is why I say that I take the minister seriously that he wants to get this policy straightened out, clarified, and in place before we send additional Canadians abroad so that they know what to expect as their compensation for taking on this difficult and dangerous work.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, who has been such a good support for me and who has led me to understand so much at the national defence committee, on which I participate with him. It has been an honour to represent the people of my riding of North Island—Powell River in this important work.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight the dedication of the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman to the Armed Forces, and I thank him for tabling this important motion. The New Democratic Party is proud to support it, as am I.

I am glad to have an opportunity to speak to the government's decision to take away from soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit that provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardships and risks associated with their deployment.

Business of Supply

I cannot express how deeply I respect the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. I know that in my own family, with several members participating in different levels of the military, it is something we hold close in our hearts, as we know it is our family and families across Canada who send their family members to represent Canada in the Armed Forces. We can never underestimate what a sacrifice that is, not only for our men and women in uniform but for the men and women who support them.

It is an honour to represent 19 Wing Comox, and it is also deeply humbling. It is the backbone of the community. It is a reminder every day of the protection we enjoy. It is also a reminder of the duty these brave men and women bring to the fabric of our country. It is a reminder of the miracles achieved, even with the constant struggles of underfunding and lack of proper equipment. I deeply admire the tremendous efficiency of the military. It is also a reminder of the close-knit families and the bond that makes Comox so beautiful. It is also a reminder of all of those we have lost.

I have had the chance to forge a relationship with the wing commander in our community. I deeply appreciate the patience and understanding, as I have been taught so much about what happens in our riding and the impact it has on our community.

The battle against ISIS is about intelligence on the ground. I am so proud of the air crews from 19 Wing Comox who are directly involved in Operation Impact, which is Canada's military contribution to the Middle East stabilization force. We are talking about the 407 Long Range Patrol Squadron, which is an integral part of 19 Wing Comox.

With CP-140 Aurora aircraft, our fighting chances are much stronger against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in the Republic of Iraq. The CP-140 Aurora aircraft from 19 Wing will undertake important intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions as well as provide overland strike coordination and armed reconnaissance coordination that will provide critical information to the coalition forces. If required, they can provide search and rescue missions. As of March 4, 2017, Aurora aircraft have conducted 732 reconnaissance missions, and I am incredibly proud of that work.

Our priority in this House is to make sure that those who serve in the Canadian Forces have the training, equipment, and support they need to deal with the difficult and dangerous work we ask them to do on our behalf every day. Unfortunately, successive governments have failed to deliver proper funding to the Armed Forces to sustain the types of deployments to which they are assigned and to make sure they have the resources they need to fulfill their role and to keep themselves safe. This includes the government delivering on efficient procurement and on increasing major capital investments in the Canadian Armed Forces as a whole.

It has been a wonderful experience for me to represent my riding and the base that resides in it. I have had an incredible opportunity to tour the facilities and to meet so many people who serve us. I have been impressed by the military's flexibility, how hard the members work to make sure that Canadians are protected every day, and the pride with which they do what they do internationally. They do not give up. They make things work, regardless of how hard that may be.

●(1125)

It is not just about equipment. The government must also ensure adequate support services are in place for the returning troops to receive the assistance they may need. Just last night this House voted on Bill C-211 on post-traumatic stress disorder. I was very happy to see this bill move forward and have the chance to be studied in committee, so we can develop a comprehensive federal framework on post-traumatic stress disorder in Canada. This is so important to supporting our men and women in uniform, and also to supporting their families that face challenges when they come home.

Recently I had the opportunity to represent Canada at a NATO update. One of the things that I came away so proud of was the incredible reputation of the Canadian Armed Forces. We heard again and again about the willingness, the flexibility, the high level of standards and training that our men and women in uniform have. It just made me feel so proud.

We know, every day, that when we stand up in the international world, we can be proud of the people who serve this country, because they have stepped up for us again and again. I think it is so important that we need to make sure we are helping save lives on the ground now by addressing the deepening humanitarian crisis unfolding in Syria and Iraq.

Canada should be a leader in alleviating the suffering of civilians caught in this conflict. Again, what we heard repeatedly is that across the world people who are in crisis trust our amazing soldiers who stand up every day. I think it is important that we look at ways to welcome refugees coming to Canada, especially when we look at the reality of the American President backing away from his country's commitment to refugees. Canada must raise its humanitarian aid to refugee camps in the region, especially in Jordan, as the refugee crisis has continued to bring the Jordanian government and society to the brink of collapse.

This mission requires clarity. I do not know if the Conservatives, while in power, were very honest about the mission from the very beginning. They misled Canadians about our soldiers being involved in the ground combat and failed to make a case for Canada's military involvement.

Now we see the current government following in those footsteps with the latest announcement on the changes to Canada's military role. When the Prime Minister made the initial announcement, he left more questions than answers regarding our role in the fight against ISIS. With increased boots on the ground at the front lines, as the Prime Minister has indicated, we now have to see what commitment Canada has made to a larger military role with no end date and no parameters to define success. It is only right that our men and women in uniform know what they are being asked to do, and know what success looks like.

Business of Supply

With Canadian troops deployed in conflict zones, those on the front lines engaging enemy forces should receive the extra tax benefit that previous deployments have received. Canadian troops have seen armed combat in this deployment, yet the government calls this mission advise and assist. We really need to know the truth here. If Canadian troops are engaged in combat operations against Islamic State fighters, how can the government justify taking away the combat tax benefit to our deployed troops?

I just want to close by saying this. I am so proud to see that all members around this House are going to support this motion moving forward. It is so important that, when we ask our men and women in uniform to potentially make the ultimate sacrifice, and when we ask those families to let them go to other countries and face huge challenges, we need to support them in the best way and make sure those families are provided the support they need.

● (1130)

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was particularly interested in hearing the member talking about the motion that we passed last night, dealing with PTSD and mental health issues. I am glad to see that we have had unanimous support for that.

Being involved with the veterans affairs committee, a lot of times, as we study mental health, veterans have talked about issues of identity loss and trust. I am wondering if the member would agree with this. By taking away what was agreed to for the soldiers before they went into theatre, taking it away from them now, that has a major impact on that trust level, when they come out of theatre, the trust level they might have for the people sending them there.

● (1135)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, we need to be talking about this. I was so happy to see the private member's bill pass yesterday, which really talked about post-traumatic stress and looked at the realities that our men and women in uniform are facing and what those challenges mean for the families.

It is true that, when troops come home who have dedicated their lives to fighting for their country, they want to make sure when they get back that the people here appreciate it, and when the government has asked them to make that sacrifice, that it is there to support them in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, in the last while, we have seen continuous cuts to veterans affairs, we have seen services on the ground removed, and we have seen more and more vulnerability for those communities, groups, and families. Absolutely, we need to do better. We hope to see the offices open and those services and supports directed to people who are veterans of this country and served us so well.

I would add that we have to make sure those services work across the country. We have a lot of rural communities where veterans are not given the services they need. We need to figure that out, because we need to support the people who have supported our country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat concerned with some of the words that are being put on the record, whether from the Conservatives or the New Democrats. I will give members a specific example.

The member across the way just made reference to cuts to veterans. However, this government has actually opened up veterans offices that the previous Conservative government cut. This government is committed to our vets. We recognize the valuable contribution that our vets have made.

We then had a member pose a question asking if members of the Canadian Forces can trust this government because of the cuts. However, it was this government that gave those benefits that they are receiving. Mr. Harper did not give them those benefits.

My question to the member is this. Will she not recognize or acknowledge that, as we continue the debate today, we should be straightforward—I do not want to be unparliamentary with my language—and be fully truthful with the comments in terms of what it is that this government is actually doing for members of our forces and our vets?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, we have to look at what those results are. We know that the past Conservative government shut down significant resources to our veterans, and we saw a lot of the offices shut down. Nine offices shut down. So far, two have been opened, and we are waiting to see what is happening with the rest.

The reality we are seeing, and I see this in my riding when veterans come in to talk to me, is that they are still not getting the support they need and require. An important reality is that we are talking about trust. There are many veterans who do not trust government anymore, because of historic realities and current realities.

It is important that we remember that this is not about any of us. This is about veterans on the ground who are struggling every day to survive, and their families are struggling with them. Therefore, we cannot make this about our egos and what we think that government did not do or this government did do. We have to focus on the people on the ground who need the support every single day, and make sure that we figure out the best solutions to serve them, regardless of where they live, and regardless of our own egos.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I find it an honour and a privilege to speak to the motion put forth by my defence committee Conservative colleague. As the Conservative defence critic, the Conservative member for the Manitoba riding of Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman is doing an outstanding job on behalf of the women and men who currently serve their country as members of the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a pleasure to work with such an informed, hard-working member of Parliament.

The motion today calls on the federal government to:

show support and appreciation for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces by reversing its decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit which provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

Business of Supply

We support our troops 100%. Canadian soldiers are on the front lines in the Middle East in the international war against terrorism. While I believe our soldiers are first class, they are getting second-class treatment from a Prime Minister who devalues the dangers they face every day. All other coalition soldiers receive special compensation through reduced taxation on their earnings. Last September, 15 soldiers serving in Kuwait were told they had to pay an additional \$1,500 to \$1,800 in taxes. The Liberal government had downgraded the risk level they faced, so in effect the government took away part of the danger pay they earned by increasing taxes. Soldiers thought this was unfair and appealed.

Conservatives thought it was unfair too, so when the Liberal Minister of National Defence came before our parliamentary defence committee, my colleagues and I had some tough questioning for him. I am going to now quote the minister's own words because they are unambiguous, or so Conservatives on the defence committee thought when we heard them. The Conservative member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman said:

The first question I want to ask relates to Operation Impact. I sent you a letter, Minister... on November 10, about some of our troops that are based in the air task force in Kuwait. We have 300-plus troops there, and 15 of them are at a U.S. air base, Camp Arifjan. They are not getting the same danger pay or income tax considerations as the rest of our troops in Kuwait

Are you committed to fixing this inequity and making sure that they get the same pay and benefits as all of our other troops who are in Operation Impact?

The Liberal defence minister replied:

Absolutely. There were even some additional challenges when I first came in and then when I first visited. We were able to address some of the direct things that were under my authority and also with getting the support of the Minister of Finance. For the specific ones that you're talking about, there is some work that the military has to do with Treasury Board as well, but we are working through the complexities based on how this is done to make sure there is more equity for our troops when it comes to deployments.

If members were there with me at that defence committee meeting, hearing the minister's answer, I think they, like me, would have thought that the minister meant that the 15 soldiers were going to see their pay and benefits restored. However, just like with the carbon tax and the health plan tax, when Liberals see an unfair tax situation, their default solution is to raise taxes on everybody, and that is exactly what was done. The Prime Minister did not help the 15 soldiers who lost the tax exemption; the Liberal Party took the exemption away from the rest of the soldiers serving in Kuwait.

For months, the Prime Minister has known that a small group of Canadian soldiers in the fight against international terrorism were having their danger pay clawed back while others on deployment were not. When confronted with this policy by our Conservative critic, the response by the Liberal Party was to claw back everyone's danger pay. Now, more than 300 soldiers will be losing up to \$9,000 for a six-month deployment because of a puppet defence minister who prefers to take his marching orders from the Prime Minister's puppet master, Gerald Butts, rather than listen to his own conscience. It is beyond belief how quickly the current government minimizes the risk that our soldiers face in the Middle East by clawing back their danger pay. The risk of death is very real. The \$1,800 per month the Liberals are ripping away from our troops and their families is peanuts to the government compared to the absence of a loved one who is proudly serving his or her country; that loss is

priceless. Also, it is peanuts compared to the billions of dollars that are being wasted on the Prime Minister's foreign aid vanity projects.

When the former Conservative defence minister faced the same problem in Afghanistan, he cut through the bureaucratic red tape to ensure our troops would not get shortchanged.

• (1140)

In 2014, before our troops were ever deployed to Kuwait, our Conservative government ensured they would be qualified for full danger pay. I invite Canadians to fact-check Finance Canada's website.

Liberal apologists are just plain wrong trying to insinuate blame to others for this outrageous clawback policy. The first cuts by the Liberals were done on September 1, 2016. The talk on the military base in Petawawa is to get ready for summer deployment and members are asking me if their pay will be clawed back, if they will have proper uniforms, remembering the decision by the Chrétien Liberals to send soldiers to Afghanistan without proper uniforms, and what else the Liberals will take away.

If the defence minister does not stand up to the Prime Minister's puppet master and take action now, a lot more troops on other missions will be impacted starting this summer. It is wrong for the Liberals to take away \$1,800 a month from our troops who are in harm's way. The members of the government really need to ask if the cost of buying a seat on the United Nations Security Council is worth the price of cheapening the lives of our soldiers by clawing back danger pay.

Liberals have no problem borrowing billions, but they undervalue the women and men serving in uniform. When will the defence minister stop funding the Prime Minister's out-of-control spending on the backs of our troops? The defence minister, I want to say, is a proud veteran and should know better than anyone how important danger pay is, not just to our brave women and men in uniform, but to their families back home as well. Soldiers who lived through the decade of darkness of military cutbacks knew that Liberals would cut defence spending when they got in again, but they did not ever imagine that the Prime Minister would literally do it on the backs of military members and their families.

On behalf of the women and men in uniform, I am asking the defence minister to quit taking his marching orders from the Prime Minister, fight for our troops, and reinstate all of the danger pay and benefits for all of our troops who are in the fight against international terrorism. I am proud of the work that our soldiers are doing, especially the special operations forces on the ground today, as well as the air combat mission that is taking place based out of Kuwait.

As a member of Parliament whose riding includes Garrison Petawawa, Canada's largest military base and home to the Canadian Special Operations Regiment, I am very sensitive about the treatment of our soldiers. The soldiers and their families are extended family to me. In our community, we share the highs and the lows and, at the end of the day, we stand together.

Business of Supply

When the member for Vancouver South was named defence minister, there was hope among our women and men in uniform that maybe, just maybe, by appointing somebody who had actual service in the military reserves, the Liberal Party was trying to make amends for the decade of darkness. The decision to claw back the pay of soldiers serving in a war zone and the mistreatment of injured veterans has eliminated any goodwill the government may have had when the member for Vancouver South was first appointed defence minister.

The disgust of all things Liberal held by the members of the military community who lived through the decade of darkness and the politically motivated decision to disband The Canadian Airborne Regiment has transferred to a new generation of soldiers. Let us not forget the veterans' disgust at the way tomorrow's veterans are being treated. Veterans are not interested in hearing how many new bureaucrats have been hired or that empty offices are being opened in government ridings. They are not interested in listening to the Liberal Party fight the last election using the same tired campaign rhetoric that was used to confuse veterans and their families.

Mindless talking points scripted by the Prime Minister's Office are not acceptable to veterans. Veterans want action. Veterans are not interested in the fake promises of the Prime Minister. Under the Liberals, our troops feel like they have been kicked in the stomach and their families feel cheated. I call on the Liberal government to finally do its job, reverse that abhorrent decision, and support the brave women and men who stand on guard for us.

• (1145)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is most unfortunate when there is such a distortion of reality.

Let me ask the member a very specific question. Can she explain to those who might be listening and possibly even some of her colleagues why it is that when Stephen Harper was the prime minister of Canada and our men and women went to Kuwait back in September 2014, Mr. Harper did not pay them hardship allowance, risk allowance, or what the Conservatives like to call danger pay? We waited months and months before the review actually took place. Once it took place and it was recommended that the Harper government provide danger pay, the government did not put it in place. It was not until we had the current Prime Minister and the current Minister of National Defence that it was put in place and it was made retroactive for members of the Canadian Forces.

Will she not at least acknowledge that that is accurate and the truth of the matter at hand?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, members opposite can put false statements or alternative facts on the record, but just because they do so does not mean they are factual. Everything the member just said was incorrect.

This whole business of taxing our troops is more and more about finding new tax targets all across the board. This week we even found out that the government is going to tax women who have home-based businesses when it put through the changes supposedly to ensure that house flipping in the housing markets in Vancouver and Toronto would be remedied. The government also managed to

sneak through a requirement so that people working from home now have to register their homes. If they are claiming any part of their house as a business expense, when they sell that house, part of the profit that would be made from the sale would have to go back to the government.

• (1150)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, on February 22, a family member of mine, Captain Mark Biernacki, a pilot with the Royal Canadian Armed Forces in the 5th (B.C.) Field Regiment, born and raised on Vancouver Island, retired after 12 years of service. Our family is very proud of his incredible commitment and sacrifices, as we are of all members of the armed forces in Canada. I am sure my colleague shares that same sentiment.

I am glad that all parties have agreed to support today's motion.

I will talk about the mental and social change that occurs when a member of the Canadian Armed Forces leaves. It really cannot be qualified. Veterans Affairs is critical in helping with this important transition. Veterans need easy access to services. The Conservative government was responsible for closing Veterans Affairs offices to members. Maybe the member could let us know if she has changed her opinion on the closure of those offices and how we could better support Mark and other members as they leave the armed forces and make sure they get easy access to services.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, our government added on to the suite of services available to veterans who were medically releasing from the military as well as all veterans. In so doing, we allocated funds toward the people rather than just the bricks and mortar that was not really being used. Where veterans needed services, the people servicing them actually went to the veterans so they did not have to travel miles to some out of the way office.

Furthermore, I am pleased to say that for releasing veterans, there are new programs in the private sector in co-operation with government that are coming up. For example, we have a new cybersecurity program located right here in Ottawa. There is funding from all sources of government so that when members medically release, even though they do not fit the universality of service, they can continue serving our country in a security capacity and be a contributing member of our society.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to share time with my esteemed colleague who just spoke, who has proudly represented the folks at CFB Petawawa for years. It is no accident that she has been here longer than most members of Parliament because of her advocacy for members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the military.

Business of Supply

I am pleased to have the opportunity to clear the record on some of the misconceptions that have been put before the House by other members, but more importantly, it is an opportunity for the House to do the right thing.

Yesterday, we voted on three private members' bills that went through, and two of them actually went against what the government wanted. The people of Canada, through their elected representatives, got what they actually wanted. If members in the House are listening to the debate on today's motion, Canadians widely across this country would want members of Parliament to do the right thing again and vote in favour of the motion, because the motion corrects an injustice. Whether anyone here wants to admit it or not, it is an injustice.

When Canadian Armed Forces members are asked to serve their country overseas in a theatre of operations, the policy generally speaking is that these members would have tax exempt status for their salary while they are there. There is a process whereby they can go through a bureaucratic rigamarole, a set of rules that are set up to basically do an assessment as to whether somebody should or should not get this tax exempt status, but that does not mean it is right.

What the problem and the issue here is, and this is a pattern of behaviour that we see from the government across the way, is the Liberals hide behind the rules all the time and then they blame the rules when things politically go wrong for them. Without having the good common sense to know what the right thing to do is, when they are only guided by a set of rules because they do not have a compass when it comes to ethical lapses, we know they are going to change the rules because it must be the rules' fault because they cannot get it right because the rules are not right. They do not have a compass when it comes to genetic discrimination. They have to hide behind the rules again. They do not have a compass when it comes to Wynn's law. They do not have a compass when it comes to this issue because this is what Canadians would expect their members of Parliament to do.

Members of Parliament, especially those like me who travel great distances to come here, get thousands of dollars a year to accommodate us for our living expenses while we are away to help us do our jobs better. We are not home on Tuesday night to mow the lawn or shovel the driveway and we cannot be out of pocket for the extra living expenses that come from our being away from our homes, because those resources from our pay and salary need to support our families back in our ridings where we actually live.

This is the exact same issue. It is a different way of dealing with it, but it is the exact same issue. These men and women put their lives on the line to serve us. We can have debates about whether or not they should or should not be in a particular theatre of operations, but that is not the point. The reality is these soldiers in the Canadian Armed Forces are deployed right now and 15 of them have lost this benefit going back to September of last year. Another 300 of them are slated to lose these same benefits this year. This is absolutely unacceptable.

We need the House and Liberal members to take the bull by the horns and realize the solution is simple. Ask the Minister of National Defence and ask the Minister of Finance, simply with the stroke of a pen, to fix this problem. This is what happened when the

Conservatives were in government. It was brought to the attention at that time to the minister of veterans affairs, the minister of defence. "When the interdepartmental committee recommended the same benefits be stripped" this was back when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, "from our troops who were serving in Afghanistan, we cut through the red tape to ensure these troops received exactly what they deserve".

I will quote what was said at the time, because the folks who were in charge at the time actually had a compass on this issue. They knew what the right thing to do was. They did not run and hide behind the rules.

"This decision about hardship and risk pay was made by officials; we believe it is incorrect, and the government intends to re-examine it." This is from the press secretary of former defence minister Peter MacKay on April 10, 2013. "This decision was not appropriate, and we are asking for this decision to be reviewed". This was said by the then veterans affairs minister on April 10.

"Our troops left with an agreed-upon salary, including risk benefits for those missions, and now halfway through their deployment this government is making significant reductions to the income on which they and their families depend." That was said by Liberal Senator Roméo Dallaire.

• (1155)

When our troops were overpaid by a departmental error, former defence minister Peter MacKay demonstrated how we stood on guard for those who defended us, and we did not ask them to pay that back. Rather than penalize the soldiers who were deployed overseas, who were overpaid by \$1,600, we had a compass that said it would be inappropriate to even ask them for the slight overpayment back. It was departmental error, an error that was no fault of the soldiers who were serving overseas and who had probably already spent or invested that money. We are not talking about millions or billions of dollars. We are talking about 15 soldiers receiving about \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month, and another 300 soldiers.

For a government that actually has no compass when it comes to balancing the books, and does not have one for any foreseeable future, surely the Liberal argument cannot be that we will balance the budget on the backs of soldiers and veterans. We have seen this before. However, I do not see any intention from the government across the way to balance the books.

If we ask Canadians what issue would be so compelling that the government would even consider going into debt for, surely it would be to compensate the men and women in our Canadian Armed Forces who stand on guard for us on a day-to-day basis, and those veterans who have served valiantly in the past. If there were ever a group in Canada that we needed to go into debt for or run a deficit for, those are the people we need to do that for.

We need the unanimous support of the House for this motion. The issue is not what he or she has said, or this is what was done years ago, or this is what has been done throughout the years. The issue is that there has been an injustice done to 15 soldiers serving overseas, and that there is about to be another injustice done to 300 more, we can fix that injustice. This is what Canadians elected us for and sent us to this place to do.

Business of Supply

While I am on my feet, I want to talk a bit about something that is going on in my riding, and why this issue is so important and so near and dear to my heart. The mission in Afghanistan, the current mission notwithstanding, was a mission of a next generation of Canadians. We have to go back to the Korean War, the Cold War, and World War II for previous generations of Canadians. The last Canadian soldier killed in the mission in Afghanistan was Master Corporal Byron Greff from my riding and my hometown of Lacombe, Alberta. Right now I am asking for support from anyone across the country or who is watching today. There is a project in place to remember that sacrifice by bringing a light armoured vehicle monument to my home community of Lacombe. Stickers are being sold and there are other various fundraising campaigns. I think this will take off for the same sentiments that are being discussed in the House today.

The people of my community and of Canada really want to support the men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. I know I can count on that kind of support from my community. I also know I can count on the same kind of support from my colleagues in the House, across all political divides, when it comes time to vote on this motion. This is the right thing to do.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I can see how deeply he cares for our military, and rightly so.

We certainly cannot disagree with giving deployed soldiers danger pay. They are far from home just like us, but in addition to being far from home, they are in danger zones. Compared to that, being here in Ottawa is not so bad.

However, there is something of a disconnect here because the member was part of the previous Conservative government that cut the army's budget to the bone. Does he see a cause and effect relationship here with the current government's attempts to pinch pennies when it comes to health care and our military families' peace of mind? Are we not lying in a bed that his party made when it was in government?

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what the hon. member is talking about. If he was paying attention, over the past 10 years when Stephen Harper was the prime minister of Canada, we had never seen more historic investments made into the Canadian Armed Forces after a decade of darkness. That included the purchase of Nyala light armoured vehicles and tanks for our soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan, the purchase of strategic lift airplanes so we no longer had to rely on Russian Antonovs to get our disaster assistance response teams, and other equipment we needed to get around the world. Now we have the C-17 program. We have five Globemasters that we can count on at any particular point in time. We also have tactical lift helicopters. We were poised to replace our entire fleet of fighters as well, and were going through that process, which has now been sidelined.

The hon. member should be asking me questions specifically about the policy when it comes to the pay, and the record the previous government had with respect to pay, which I was glad to

address in my speech. All I know is, thank God Stephen Harper was the prime minister of our country for 10 years. The Canadian Armed Forces is better off for it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we might differ in whether we appreciate the valuable contributions that Mr. Harper made to the Canadian Armed Forces. We will get another opportunity to talk about that.

Could the member provide his thoughts on the process? Does the member believe we currently have a hardship and risk committee that evaluates the level of risk and hardship? Overseas, things do change over time. Could the member share his thoughts about the importance of re-evaluation, who does the evaluation, and who is best to do it?

• (1205)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I will remind my hon. colleague that it was his government's decision to withdraw our six pack of CF-18 fighters from the fight against ISIS. Our troops were in better shape because they had the superior air power there to defend the troops on the ground. That capability is now lost. In return, there are several hundred more men and women on the ground.

Members do not have to listen to my opinion. We can listen to the chief of the defence staff, John Vance, who said, on February 9, "We want Canadians to know that we will be involved in engagements as we defend ourselves or those partners who we are working with." The chief of the defence staff clarified "You put a lot more people on the ground in a dangerous place, it is riskier overall."

Brigadier General Peter Dawe, updating Operation Impact on October 6, 2016 said:

The key takeaway for Canadians is we are more engaged at the line. There should be no doubt about that. And by extension, the risk has increased to our troops simply by virtue of time spent at the line and the work we're doing right now in a more dynamic and fluid environment.

I could go on with several others. I do not know why the hon. colleague has not listened to the advice that his own government bureaucrats have been providing. Everybody there seems to think they are in a riskier situation than they were when the fighter jets were there.

The policy of the government is to withdraw the six pack of fighter jets, which provided more certainty and predictability and more protection for the soldiers on the ground, and instead put more soldiers on the ground, putting them in a riskier place, and then has taken away their pay. Well done.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between this government and the former Harper government. We believe it is important that we work with our global partners. In working with our global partners, it was determined this was the best way in which Canada could perform at that site. All in all, things are going quite well, and it was a smart decision made by this government.

Business of Supply

I want to pick up on a couple of points. It is important that we recognize the role members of our Canadian Forces play. I want to quote what the Prime Minister said back on February 14, because it really highlights the importance of our Canadian Forces. He said:

We are focused on delivering what is necessary in terms of equipment, in terms of support, and in terms of honour and value to the extraordinary men and women who serve this country on the front lines and everywhere around the world.

This government has been consistent from day one in wanting to be there in a very real and tangible way in supporting our troops.

We have a Minister of National Defence, a decorated veteran from Afghanistan, among many other things, who has done an incredible job in picking up what was left from the Conservative Party and moving us forward. The issue we are debating today is an excellent example of that.

I listened to members across the way as they tried to change history. At times it is important we ensure that listeners and others who might be reviewing what is taking place are aware of the facts.

I pointed out a fact and the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke responded by closing her eyes, being completely blind to the truth. She continued to spread concerns or thoughts that were stretching the limits of truth.

I should give a bit of a review of what we are talking about.

We all recognize the important and incredible work that members of our Canadian Forces do for us abroad and in Canada. At times, there is a certain amount of a risk level or a hardship level that our troops have to endure. We have a special committee of individuals, which is made up of a representative from the RCMP, multiple members of the Canadian Forces, along with a government representative from Treasury Board, quite possibly, who sit on this hardship committee. There is a very robust system they have to go through to make an evaluation. When we deploy someone overseas, they look at the hardship and other risks. Based on that criteria and robust approach, they are able to come up with an assessment and a recommendation to the government.

I should have said at the very beginning, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Saint-Jean,

That committee of experts understands the situations at hand. It is important to recognize that this evaluation is done after deployment.

Former prime minister, Stephen Harper, sent members of the forces to Kuwait back in September 2014. Conservative members across the way are trying to leave the impression that along with that deployment went a government directive saying that hardship and risk allowance were going to be provided for them. That is not what took place. The previous government did not say that it would give a hardship and risk allowance when it deployed the troops back in September 2014.

●(1210)

In fact, what had actually taken place was that there was a hardship committee, which had been established for many years, that had to do an evaluation. That evaluation took place and conclusions were drawn, I believe, some time in June 2015. At the time, it was still Prime Minister Stephen Harper. There was no decision by the former government, within days or weeks or even months of

receiving it, to give what we often refer to as danger pay to our men and women overseas in Kuwait. There was no decision on the Conservatives' part to make that immediate decision and give that pay.

In fact, I thought it was interesting that the former Conservative minister of defence said something to the effect of, "The Conservatives say just do it". I would suggest that Stephen Harper did not do it. In fact, October 2014 is when the troops were sent. The Conservatives are telling our Minister of National Defence and our government to just do it. They did not just do it.

After the election came to an end and a new government was in place, a litany of priorities were brought to the table of the government. I would argue that the Minister of National Defence did his job and brought this issue to the table. It was the current Minister of National Defence who brought the issue to the attention of the Minister of Finance, and then we actually had it passed in 2016. That was just last year. It was this government that made it retroactive. The irony is that the Conservative Party is trying to take credit for what was clearly a Liberal decision based on a sound recommendation from a committee.

Now the Conservatives are trying to rewrite history and say that the government needs to do this. We have had the Minister of National Defence once again come to the table and clearly indicate to this House that this is a policy the Harper government did not want to change. We have a Liberal administration saying that it will review this policy. That is where we are today. That policy is being reviewed by this government, and at some point, there will be some results from that policy. However, the Conservatives are trying to give the impression that they are the ones who truly care about this issue, when they had a chance to act and they failed to do so. It was this government that took action and made it retroactive. The Conservatives try to come across as more sensitive than the current government. I would suggest that this is false.

We understand what is taking place. We appreciate the fact that risk levels change. If the risk factors change and it goes down, that means our men and women abroad are not having to endure the same level of personal risk or hardship, but it is not up to me to make that determination. I have confidence in the hardship and risk committee that is made up of professionals.

I believe that the government is doing what is responsible. We understand. We are the ones who made it retroactive. We understand that there is a need to review the policy. The Minister of National Defence is doing just that. At the end of the day, we will wait and see what comes of that review.

I appreciate the opportunity to share a few thoughts on the issue.

●(1215)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is about Canadian troops who are engaged in combat operations against the Islamic State fighters. How can the government justify taking away the combat tax to benefit our deployed troops?

Business of Supply

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the member heard what I was talking about with respect to the hardship and risk committee that has been established. It has been in place for many years now. As the level of risk changes, which can be positive, circumstances may change. That is one reason the Minister of National Defence made very clear that we want to review the policy. This is, in fact, what is taking place today. It is the responsible approach in dealing with this issue and in providing assurances to members.

We appreciate the valuable role members of our Canadian Forces play in our values and our sovereignty. We are working diligently in a very robust fashion on a number of fronts to make sure that our Canadian Forces are served well through the House of Commons.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary made the same mistake the Minister of National Defence did by saying that they had dealt with this issue in the past and that in February, the minister had to stop a reassessment for troops that were deployed to Kuwait. However, in fact, I had a question on the Order Paper, Question No. 600, that I asked back on November 16. The response from the minister was that all our troops in Operation Impact, whether in Kuwait or anywhere else in the Middle East, received all of their tax benefits, \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month, and it is signed by the Minister of National Defence. It was tabled in the House by the parliamentary secretary himself. I have the signature. I wonder why he never read it to know that all of our troops had their benefits for the entire time they were in Kuwait, up until September 1.

Even if what the minister is saying is true, that he had to intervene back in February 2016 to ensure that all troops received their hardship pay and benefits and tax relief, why did he not do it in September 2016? There is the rub. There is hypocrisy here in what the minister says he did in February that he refused to do back in September 2016.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how much clearer one can make it. If it were not for this Minister of National Defence, our men and women in Kuwait would never have received the benefit. It was this Minister of National Defence who brought the issue to the government of the day, which ultimately allowed the payments our men and women received in Kuwait.

The former prime minister, Stephen Harper, did not sign off on it. He did not allow the money to flow to our men and women. If it were not for this Minister of National Defence, they would never have received the money, as it was determined that they were in a high-risk, hardship situation, which allowed them to be eligible for the allowance and the tax relief. It was this government that recognized that, and it was this government, through the recommendation of the Minister of National Defence, I suspect, that put it in place. It is this government that is reviewing the policy, a policy the former government did not see fit to revisit.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, consensus in this House can be elusive.

However, on one point we all agree: our women and men in uniform deserve our highest respect. We must support our soldiers deployed around the world. We must recognize the dangers and discomforts they face, and we must compensate them fairly for their sacrifices.

The Department of National Defence has in place an impartial and transparent process to ensure that we do. Every member deployed receives a comprehensive compensation and benefits package. Sometimes that package includes a hardship allowance and a risk allowance, two monthly payments to compensate for conditions that are more uncomfortable, more stressful and more unsafe than those on a base here at home.

Decisions regarding whether a mission warrants those allowances do not happen at the bureaucratic level. The Treasury Board Secretariat is at the table, but in the chairperson's seat is a brigadier general. All around the chairperson are lieutenant colonels, majors, RCMP officers, women and men in uniform who have been on tour, who know the realities of combat, and who have made the same sacrifices we ask of our current troops abroad.

What is more, no one on the committee is answerable to the chain of command. Everyone can make their decisions without outside influence, without fear of reprisal, and without concern for operating budgets. Cost is never a factor. The committee's sole interest, then, is to determine hardship and risk levels that reflect the actual conditions on the ground, assign hardship and risk levels that represent the true stresses and hazards in the field, and lastly, assign hardship and risk levels that are objective and defensible.

The committee looks at 21 individual factors that affect a mission's hardship score. The committee weighs everything from the quality of drinking water and the availability and cleanliness of washrooms to the receptiveness of the local population and the demands of soldiers' daily routines. Similarly the committee weighs six factors for the risk score: from civic instability and the threat posed by hostile forces to the presence of infectious diseases and the risk of a natural disaster. The committee examines the probability of each hazard and considers the severity of the possible impact on our troops.

The evidence for their conditions? It comes straight from the source. Thirty days after the start of a new mission, the committee requests information directly from the field. In the case of the operations in Kuwait, senior military officials submitted a 20-page report on the conditions in the theatre of operations.

A doctor familiar with the mission, and an intelligence officer with his ear to the ground in the Middle East provided insights, too. At the time, soldiers were deployed to three locations in Kuwait: first, where our CP-140 Aurora and CC-150 aircraft were based; second, where our CF-18 fighters took off and landed; and third, where a small group of staff people was posted. Effective October 2014, all three were deemed medium risk. However, as you are well aware the security situation in the region is fluid.

Business of Supply

• (1225)

Circumstances change continually and, in some regards, change dramatically.

For this reason, the committee reviews levels regularly, with regard to risk and difficulty, to ensure that they continue to reflect the actual conditions of a specific operation in a specific location. When the committee reassessed the risk scores for Kuwait in March 2016, all three operations dropped slightly. Two slipped just below the medium-risk threshold. They dropped again for one of the operations six months later, when conditions had changed significantly enough to warrant yet another review.

Finally, in December 2016, the committee reviewed a combined assessment for the two locations in Kuwait where personnel are deployed for Operation Impact. The hardship level went up, and the allowances paid to soldiers went up immediately too. The risk level, however, went down.

Soldiers will continue to receive risk allowances based on the earlier, higher rate for six months following that decision. In other words, personnel will have six months' grace, until June 2017, before they see the actual risk score reflected on their paycheques. As a result, soldiers have not yet seen any changes in their pay.

For some members of the House, the issue is not about the pay itself but rather the applicable tax break. The Income Tax Act states in black and white that risk allowances for medium- and high-risk missions are eligible for tax relief. Any mission with a risk score of 2.50 or higher receives the relief automatically. Missions that score between 2.00 and 2.49 receive the relief when the Minister of Finance designates them as medium risk.

The Minister of National Defence has always asked the Minister of Finance for that "medium risk" designation for our troops. He has always sought that tax break for our soldiers, and he has always received it. Once a mission's risk level falls below medium-risk threshold, however, it is out of the Minister of National Defence's hands.

The Income Tax Act simply does not allow for tax breaks on relatively low-risk missions. The two locations in Kuwait now fall within that category. Brigadier Generals, Commanders, Lieutenant Colonels, and representatives from the Treasury Board Secretariat agree on this.

The committee followed every rule in the book to ensure the same considerations are given to all service members everywhere. Their assessments specific to the postings in Kuwait are fair, objective, and rooted in the realities on the ground. Should those realities change, we will reassess the country's hardship and risk levels.

In the meantime, we will continue to support our troops, and we will continue to provide first-rate compensation and benefits packages. We will continue to ensure our soldiers benefit personally, professionally, and financially from their hard, much appreciated, and much respected work.

• (1230)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's debate is centred on the following question: who is telling the truth? Official documents were signed by

the Minister of National Defence. Today the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is saying something else. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence made a lovely speech, reading the notes from the Department of Defence, which is fine.

I would like my colleague to explain to me how they can tell soldiers deployed specifically to Arifjan, Kuwait, that their status is going to change and that they will be stripped of their benefits while they are deployed there on missions.

Why will the deployed soldiers not be able to keep their benefits, and why will the next soldiers to be deployed there not be given the new rate?

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Like him, we care about pay for our military. It is important to us.

As for the case he is referring to, the standards that we apply are very reliable and very transparent. They were established when my colleague's party was in government. His party encountered this problem at the time and could have changed the standards.

The minister asked the chief of the defence staff to validate and analyze these standards and to recommend a procedure that will not operate on a case-by-case basis, but instead that will stretch out over time and probably be included in the new national defence policy.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, especially considering that the member for Saint-Jean is very familiar with the reality facing our soldiers, at least with respect to military bases and their families.

We will recall that a while ago there were disagreements about the interpretation of the mission. It was often called an advise and assist mission, when clearly our troops deployed there are put in harm's way. I would therefore like to know the reasoning behind the decision to not grant this danger pay.

Is it because, deep down, they want to deny that our troops there are being put in harm's way?

M. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Obviously, everyone in the House of Commons agrees that every member of the Canadian Armed Forces must be given fair and equitable pay.

It is a matter of ensuring that we have an impartial and transparent process. No one is denying that there is a level of risk. We are analyzing that risk. As I explained earlier, there is a process in place to re-evaluate the level of risk of every mission, and we are making adjustments as a result of that process. It is a matter of fairness.

I would like to remind members that, in this case, the status has changed but people have not seen any change in their danger pay. That will not change until the end of June. Anything can happen between now and then. However, our goal is to ensure that we have an impartial and transparent process.

Business of Supply

•(1235)

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

I would like to begin today by expressing my condolences to the family of Master Corporal Alfred Barr and those he served with. He was a member of 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, part of 17 Wing Winnipeg. He died in a training accident near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, yesterday. I would like to express my sincere condolences to his family, those he served with in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and all Canadian Armed Forces.

It highlights that, regardless of whether our forces members are engaged in training missions or active missions around the world, every day they face dangers, just as our first responders do when they put on the uniform to go out and protect us, as members of the Canadian Armed Forces do. They face dangers every day. I want to express my sympathies to his family and his colleagues.

I also want to highlight and express gratitude to the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman and his deputy defence critic, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, for putting this motion forward today in Parliament. Quite frankly, I am having a tough time believing that we are actually spending a day in Parliament debating whether our forces, deployed overseas in danger zones, are going to have tax-free benefits taken away from them. I find it unbelievable that we are actually debating that.

With a simple stroke of a pen, the Minister of National Defence could advise the Minister of Finance that this can be done. It is that simple. We heard this morning from other members of a similar situation that happened with the hon. Peter MacKay. He made sure that a wrong was righted with respect to Canadian Forces members and tax-free allowances for danger pay. It is incredible to me that we are actually spending time debating this issue today.

Base Borden is in close proximity to the area that I represent. The base is an integral part of the community. It employs 3,200 military members and 1,500 civilian members. It also houses the military generation training group, which 16,000 Canadian Forces members go through annually, and many of them spend a lot of time in the community. The city of Barrie and all surrounding cities in central Ontario, in fact, have a great affinity for the base and the contributions it makes to all communities in central Ontario. I want to recognize as well Colonel McGarry, who is the base commander, and honorary Colonel Jamie Massie for the work that they do in ensuring that all of the military and civilian communities integrate extremely well, as they do.

Why are we here today? The answer is simple. Our forces members have been notified that they are going to have some tax-free allowances taken away from them. A CTV story in September indicated that 300 Canadian Forces personnel in Kuwait were losing a tax break of up to \$1,800 a month after the military downgraded the risk assessment of their mission, even though some personnel regularly enter Iraq as part of their duties.

I will remind members of just how dangerous these regions are. I understand that it is not Iraq, but any time people put uniforms on,

any time they are deployed around the world, the men and women who serve so bravely in our Canadian Forces are in danger. Just yesterday in Kabul, ISIS militants disguised as doctors killed 38 people in a Kabul hospital attack. Those are the types of threats that exist on a day in, day out basis.

•(1240)

To diminish in any way the dangers that our men and women face is disingenuous to them, a disservice to them. Regardless of where our troops are deployed, irrespective of the dangers they face, the least we can do from a monetary standpoint is ensure that they get what they deserve and, more importantly, that their families get what they deserve.

I am our party's critic for veterans affairs and I sit on the veterans affairs committee. We have heard a lot of testimony dealing with the transitional aspects of moving from military life to civilian life, PTSD, and occupational stress injuries and how they affect the mental health of our soldiers. These have an equal effect on their families, families that are struggling day in and day out dealing with the fact that their loved ones are deployed overseas, not knowing what they are doing and the dangers they are facing. Think of the added stress on those family members when they are not being compensated in the manner in which they should be.

As I was listening to the debate in my office this morning, I went through some figures. This issue really came up in February, although it has been ongoing since last September. Our defence critic has been speaking to the minister about this. He initiated an Order Paper question. I looked at the numbers this morning and found that, since February 15, almost \$1.3 billion has been doled out by the Liberal government for various projects across the country, and that does not include the \$650 million that was issued yesterday for reproductive and health issues. The retroactive cost of this benefit to the men and women who serve our country is roughly \$3 million, and since this issue came up, the Liberal government has doled out \$1.3 billion and \$650 million yesterday.

Why? That is the question. Why are we not looking after our men and women in uniform? A simple stroke of the pen would solve this issue. To the families who serve, we have an obligation to help them while their men and women are serving overseas.

What does it say to the families of our men and women who serve, and to those who served, when our government will not look after their financial needs? Not properly compensating them, in this case with respect to tax-free allowances, somehow diminishes the risk that they face overseas. I would suggest that it causes incredible distrust of the government. It causes morale issues among those who are serving. In fact, it would cause morale issues for those who are here at home. It also affects recruitment and the ability to attract people to our Canadian Forces. What does it say to our recruitment efforts if the government is not going to look after our members and diminishes the role they play by not properly compensating them? Why would I want to get involved in the Canadian Forces if I think that my government does not have my back if I am deployed, and more importantly, it does not have my family's back if I am deployed? It is a great cause for concern.

Business of Supply

This is the third time I have said this today. We are spending all day debating this. This issue has been going on since last September. The government has said that it is doing consultations and that it is going to review it. One stroke of a pen would solve this issue.

I am asking the government, on behalf of the families of Canadian Forces members, on behalf of those who serve so bravely, to resolve the problem, please.

• (1245)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way mentioned the effects our first responders, police, firefighters, and Canadian Armed Forces members witness when serving their communities. I would like to highlight the more than 30 years of service he has given to his community in the fire department. I would like to thank him for that and for his advocacy in veterans affairs.

Does the member feel the families that are in his riding are being supported, given the many outreach efforts we are making to get this right? Could the member explain what he thinks we could be doing to make sure those families that are affected by this are supported?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her acknowledgement of my service within the community, of which I was very proud to be a part.

To answer the question, the first thing we need to do is correct this. I think all of us would agree that we need to correct what I would call an injustice to those families and those who are serving. A simple stroke of a pen could solve this problem. The Minister of National Defence could go to the Minister of Finance, use his ministerial authority, and it would be completed.

On the issue of families and what we need to do to support our members, I think the hon. member brought up a critical point. We need to understand that, when members of the Canadian Forces serve, it is not just they who are serving. It is not just they who are paying the price. Their families are paying the price; their spouses, their children are paying the price.

I have had the opportunity to visit many resource centres across the country, including Base Borden, close to home. I will say that there is a significant attempt among those who are involved in those military resource centres to make sure they help our families. However, at the end of the day, and I think all hon. members in this House agree, we need to look after not only those who serve but our veterans as well.

There is a lot of work to do. There is no question about that. I think the hon. member would acknowledge that. We have had meetings about this, on the work we can do to improve the lives of our veterans and to treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Barrie—Innisfil for his speech and for acknowledging the family of Master Corporal Alfred Barr. I think our whole country shares the sadness and sends condolences to Master Corporal Barr's family.

I have a family member who just retired after 12 years of serving the Royal Canadian Air Force, Captain Mark Biernacki. He was previously a member of the 5th (British Columbia) Field Artillery Regiment. He made Vancouver Islanders and certainly my family very proud, as we are of all members of the Canadian Armed Forces. They face incredible danger, and the sacrifice they make is second to none in our country.

The mental and social change that occurs when a member of the Canadian Armed Forces leaves cannot be qualified. Easy access to veteran services is critical in helping with this transition.

Could the member talk about how we can better support our veterans when they are leaving the military? We know that the past government closed some seven veterans offices. There was concern that veterans could not get easy access. Could the member talk about supporting the reopening of all of those offices and how we can better support those veterans?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. I have family members who served in the military. My cousin's husband was with special forces in Afghanistan. He is suffering now with back injuries as a result of his years of service to our country.

One of the things we are hearing at the veterans affairs committee is the need for better transitional access into civilian life. I know the Department of National Defence ombudsman, supported by the Veterans Affairs ombudsman, has spoken about a concierge service. One of the stressors that exist is the amount of work that is required in that transitional aspect of being medically released. A concierge service would consolidate all of that.

I could go on for hours about this, on how we could improve the service.

• (1250)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for those who are listening today, the Liberal government made the decision to revoke a tax benefit that provides \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month to Canadian soldiers currently deployed in the fight against ISIS and stationed in Kuwait. The motion before us today asks the House to:

call on the government to show support and appreciation for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces by reversing its decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit which provides them with [this tax benefit] for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at [this installation] whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

This seems fairly reasonable to me, and I certainly hope that all members in the House will support this, for several reasons.

I want to leave the technical reasons to the end of my speech, but I want to talk a bit about a more macro-level principle. I actually have a great amount of concern about Canadians' view of the military, its role, and its necessity, and some of the decisions that have been made in this Parliament around the military's utility and function.

Business of Supply

Last Remembrance Day, a friend who has served in the military sent me a blog post written by the wife of a deployed soldier. In it, she tried to describe their relationships and the expectations of the struggles borne by both of them. For him it is the mental and physical anguish faced by somebody who is deployed, and for her it is the loss and the loneliness that inevitably punctuate their relationships. What really struck me about this post was that it closed with this “it is worth it because” statement: that the faith placed in their trials is for the sustainment of the greater good. What really struck me about it was that the woman who was writing this post was writing it from a place of it being a personal struggle for the two of them, one that should be borne in private. Letting our men and women in uniform get to the point where the struggles they are bearing become something that is private and that the entire community and our country do not support or get behind is a source of great worry and should be of great shame for all Canadians.

I am concerned that it is both a blessing and a curse that, as a country, we are three generations removed from any sort of major conflict within our own borders or full-on global warfare. A lot of Canadians, especially younger generations of Canadians—certainly my cohort and my contemporaries—live in a world where we think war is something that happens someplace else. We think that the peace and the freedoms we have in Canada are static and unchanging and that they cannot be threatened.

If there is one thing I have learned in the six years of acting as an elected official and having gone to some of the conflict areas and having talked to people and been involved in votes regarding the deployment of our men and women in uniform, it is that this assumption and generality could not be further from the truth. The reality is that many of the rights we enjoy here in Canada are fragile and they have to be maintained. While we rely on and value innovators and entrepreneurs in our country who grow our economy, the reality is that the people who maintain those freedoms are our men and women in uniform. I sometime think that we are getting to a point in the history of our country when we are forgetting that. It becomes removed from our everyday thinking. I see it in things such as, across two governments, allowing our bureaucracy to drag its heels on procurement, making very poor decisions. Cabinet ministers have to be right on top of their bureaucrats because they are going to put up decisions that make sense to them, that are made in a vacuum, and that are not in the best interests of our men and women in uniform. I really feel this is what happened here today. I feel that a bureaucratic committee sat around and made a decision for some men and women in uniform who are standing up for what is good and right and protecting our freedoms, and the bureaucrats are not really appreciating the actual cost of that.

I spoke to a friend this morning who has served in several deployments as part of the military, and I asked why this is important.

• (1255)

He made the point that it is all great for this committee to make the decision, or for us to sit here and debate this and vote against it one way or another, but “...as you sit in your nice offices, we're sitting here smelling open pit burns”. I had to ask him what that was. It is when our troops have to burn their sewage with jet fuel.

They have F-16 Hellcats flying in at two o'clock in the morning, wonderful mess hall food going through them with a level of gastrointestinal distress, chemical alarms, air raid sirens, and the risk of car bombs coming in. We get to wear civilian clothes. They do not. Kuwait, where these men and women are stationed right now, is not Canada, everything costs more for them. If they do get a pass, things are going to cost a lot more.

To paraphrase the conversation, they might not be getting shot at every day, but “the risk is really high”. There is a cost both financially and emotionally that is borne by our men and women who are over there and by their families back at home.

Bureaucrats might be sitting in the government lobby right now looking at some sort of technical matrix around risk assessment levels. I am looking at the fact that American soldiers are getting this. I am not quite sure about the difference in salary levels, fair enough, but they are certainly getting tax exemption status.

I pulled up our travel advisory for Kuwait. It talks about a high risk of terrorism. This is not an environment that we would perhaps willingly go into that our men and women in uniform are going into, so this small tax exemption is something that is absolutely reasonable. Going back to my earlier statement, it shows that Canadians understand the true cost of bearing this burden by our men and women in uniform.

I have a few other points, very quickly. The government is probably going to post a budget with close to a \$50-billion deficit. To my colleague's point, I cannot understand why it would not, with a stroke of a pen, support our men and women in uniform with this decision. There is precedent for this decision. When we were in government, we had a similar discussion around troops who were deployed in Afghanistan. A decision was made to do essentially what the motion today calls for.

The one thing I want to highlight that was really concerning for me is that the decision to revoke this tax benefit was made after troops had agreed to deploy. In cutting the benefits, the Liberals have cheated our troops and their families out of hard-earned money that they expected, counted on, and deserved. I cannot imagine sending someone out to serve in such a stressful situation, asking them to serve our country and to acknowledge the fact that Canadian freedoms are not a static thing, and then say, “Oh, by the way, a committee of bureaucrats has changed your risk level and you're not getting this, what you budgeted for”.

Our men and women in uniform and their families have to make tough decisions when it comes to budgeting. For some people in the chamber, \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month might not seem like a lot, but it sure is to the families of these people.

It is really shameful that we are having this discussion here today. I am embarrassed that I have to stand here and say the government is about to post this giant deficit, giving money to everything but this. I just do not understand.

Business of Supply

This is the second time where elected officials have had to intervene in a situation like this. I would suggest that the process does not work and there are some seriously out of touch DND bureaucrats who are making these decisions. When I looked through the letter justifying this, which the Minister of Defence sent my colleague from Manitoba who is our defence critic, I could tell that a bureaucrat wrote the letter. There is no compassion in it. It is all, “we applied a matrix and blah, blah, blah, risk level”. The Department of National Defence spends billions of dollars on bureaucrats telling us why we cannot build ships. Surely, they can give \$1,500 a month in tax benefits to our men and women who are actually doing what DND is supposed to do. I really feel like this is a no-brainer.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go to the committee of bureaucrats that the member makes reference to. This committee of bureaucrats also made a recommendation to see pay increases for risk for our troops in Kuwait back in 2014, yet the prime minister of the day sat on that recommendation and did not put into place that recommendation.

I wonder if the member across the way, in that same compassionate way, could explain why she thinks that the former prime minister did not listen to what that committee of bureaucrats recommended when it said that we should be giving our men and women abroad that so-called danger pay. The prime minister back then had a choice. It was not put into place until the current Prime Minister and the current Minister of National Defence made their decision and, fortunately, that decision included making it retroactive so that our men and women abroad received something they were entitled to based on that committee of bureaucrats.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely love it when Liberals get up in the House of Commons to try to defend their record on spending for our men and women in uniform. We know that successively since the first Prime Minister Trudeau, it has been an ideological opposition to the existence of the military. The first Prime Minister Trudeau did everything that he could to reduce the—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member across the way does have experience inside the House. It is the second time she has made reference to the prime minister with his name. It is okay to say prime minister Stephen Harper because he is no longer inside the House.

If we are going to say prime minister with the name, then we should be able to do it on both sides of the House, because I would love the opportunity to say all the wonderful things our current Prime Minister has done.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe the hon. member did correct herself by referring to the father and not the son. She said “the first” just as you were getting up.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I did say the first Prime Minister Trudeau. Again, I will say it. The first Prime Minister Trudeau, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. This was a man who was ideologically opposed to Canada having a military writ large.

I look at the history of our former government. Frankly, we had to spend 10 years recovering from an entire generation of Liberal policy that gutted our military equipment and sent out troops in

bright forest green camo in the middle of the desert. I find it completely rich and ridiculous that the member stands and has the audacity to suggest that the Liberal record on this is better.

That aside, I will also note that he deflected and did not say whether or not the government would support making a very simple change here, ensuring that this situation that is happening in Kuwait right now is rectified.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, certainly I agree with the member. It is shameful that we are here in this House today talking about the cutting of this tax benefit. As the member Barrie—Innisfil said earlier, with a stroke of a pen we can fix this. I am very glad that all parties have agreed to support the motion.

Canadian troops must receive the equipment and training that optimizes the successful completion of their mission. This includes the government delivering on efficient procurement and increasing major capital investment in the Canadian Armed Forces as a whole.

Given that the Department of National Defence faces the largest recapitalization of the Armed Forces in its post-World War II history, could the budget cuts that were mandated under the former Conservative government have actually delayed crucial procurement that is needed to meet current operational requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces? Maybe the member could answer that for me.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, the member needs to look at his own voting record. He actually voted against increases to the Department of National Defence's budget that were made under our government. In every single budget, I think he voted against that, consecutively, time and time again. He is from a party that, frankly, is ideologically opposed to using our military to serve any purpose. I will not take lessons from the New Democratic Party members on any sort of policy to support the men and women in uniform in our country because, again, I think they would be worse than the Liberals in this. I will put that on the record.

That said, I feel like if I was serving in the military and was listening to this conversation right now, I would be ashamed and say, “Just pay me properly. I'm out here doing a lot of work for my country and I'm away from my family. Get it right.”

To those people who may be listening, I apologize on behalf of all of us and I certainly hope the government will do the right thing.

• (1305)

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

As the motion before this House today acknowledges, Operation Impact carries risk and our fight against ISIL carries risk. All deployments involve an element of risk, and on that there really is no debate.

I am happy to speak in support of the motion this afternoon and also to support our government, which is also in favour of the motion.

Business of Supply

Whatever the mission, we cannot eliminate risk entirely. What we can do is protect our troops by preparing them well. This means, of course, giving them the right training and equipment to do their job. It also means making sure that they receive timely mental and physical health care that meets their specific needs.

The military health services that Canada provides are mission-tailored. They are different for every deployment, and their size and nature differs on a case-by-case basis.

[*Translation*]

How is that done? The Minister of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces consult the host country and our allies on the ground. They look at things like geography, from the location of our operations and the isolation of our troops to the harshness of the environment. They also take into consideration factors such as the presence or absence of ally medical facilities in the region, the travel restrictions imposed by local authorities, and ease of travel. They also analyze every security threat.

All of these considerations, not to mention the number of Canadian military personnel who will be deployed, help to determine the services that are put in place for our men and women in uniform.

[*English*]

As members can well appreciate, these services can take any number of forms. The driving force, however, is always the same, which is to ensure that members have access to excellent care and support before, during, and after a mission.

Before they can confirm their assignment, CF members have to go through a pre-deployment screen with our military health professionals. The purpose of this screening is to flag any pre-existing condition that could lead to problems during the mission. A simple earache, for instance, can be very disruptive to deployed members, and it can keep them from doing their job effectively. For a pilot, however, it could even cloud his or her judgment and have catastrophic consequences. Members also get dental screenings prior to departure as well as vaccinations against current and emerging infectious diseases in the region where they will be deployed.

Another important purpose of the pre-deployment screening is to make sure that each member is well and ready to go on mission from a psychosocial perspective. Lessons learned from past missions have taught us that most stress injuries are not caused by trauma alone. We know that the risk of stress injuries is higher when a member has experienced mental health issues prior to deployment, such as chronic anxiety problems, or when a member is in a difficult social or family context, such as tensions in a marriage or stress associated with taking care of an ill parent. Part of the pre-deployment screening process is to help members identify any pre-existing concern that should be addressed prior to deployment.

Personnel also go on a half-day training with a group of peers as part of the road to mental readiness program. This training gives members new techniques to cope with stressors; new tools, such as goal setting, visualization, and self-talk to build resistance; and new strategies to harness their inner strength to rebound from possible challenges during the mission.

● (1310)

[*Translation*]

Another key lesson that CF members take from this training is knowing when they feel good and when they should seek help.

The Canadian Armed Forces have cleared away many obstacles to seeking help. For too long, asking for help was seen as a sign of weakness. Our CF members suffered in silence for fear of losing their colleagues' trust or jeopardizing their career.

However, the organization has changed. Much progress has been made toward creating a culture in which everyone is comfortable saying they are not okay. At no point are Canadian military members left on their own without any resources, not even after their role in a mission is over.

As for people who leave the military for medical reasons, the Minister of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces work closely with Veterans Affairs Canada and other partners to facilitate a successful transition to civilian life.

These measures are taken so that injured or sick CF members and their families have access to benefits, services and compensation.

[*English*]

For other soldiers, the return home can, in and of itself, be a significant stressor. Readjusting to life in Canada and reuniting with loved ones after experiencing radically different realities can be hard, so the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces make sure to provide adequate support at that point as well. Within three to six months, members have a post-deployment screening with physical and mental health professionals, whose role is quite simply to make sure that they are well in all aspects of their lives, to help them transition to a normal life, to rebuild healthy relationships with their families, and to help flag any signs of an operational stress injury.

For serving members who need help, the Department of National Defence has made excellent specialized services available. There are 26 mental health clinics and seven operational trauma and stress support centres located on military bases across Canada. In all, there are 33 sites to ensure that ill and injured personnel receive high-quality support, regardless of the communities they return to in Canada. Personnel can also call the 1-800 number 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. All of these services, of course, are free of charge.

One of Canada's most valuable and cherished resources is our women and men in uniform. The unfortunate reality is that some become ill or injured while in service. The Canadian Armed Forces are dedicated to ensuring that each and every one of these members receives high-quality care and support. Not only are the Armed Forces duty bound to do so, they are proud to help our sailors, soldiers, and aviators get the most from their careers and their lives.

Business of Supply

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to rise to talk about our men and women in uniform.

The member spoke about many of the different services offered within the Canadian Armed Forces to make sure that men and women are supported. However, the motion before us today is specific to danger pay. Would the member say that in his opinion, as a member, he feels that the motion should be supported and that men and women in the forces should receive that support due to the difficulties they are currently in and the environment we send them to?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am in support of the motion. I feel that danger pay is applicable. It is almost a no-brainer that when we send our men and women into harm's way, compensation should be commensurate with the risk, the isolation, and the hardship. It is not just the Canadian Forces that do that. It is the United Nations, with which I had the privilege of serving in Iraq, as well as the U.S. armed forces.

I will take the opportunity to inform the House that the defence committee travelled to Washington just this week and had a chance to speak with Senator John McCain, who expressed his gratitude for the service of the men and women of the Armed Forces, particularly in Afghanistan, and of those members who paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. It is a resounding sentiment that the level of danger inherent in these missions should be compensated.

• (1315)

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the hon. member back to the House after a few days away in Washington talking about the issues he mentioned in his speech.

I would ask the member if he could describe to the House the feeling he got about the relationship between the Canadians and the Americans as they served together in various parts of the world.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, the question from my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour underscores the length of the Canada-U.S. relationship along so many axes, but perhaps none more important than in the field of security and the joint security work we are doing in North America and abroad and in very dangerous but important missions, such as the fight against Daesh.

We have an excellent relationship, which we received feedback on during our trip to Washington. From the level of our Minister of National Defence and the U.S. Secretary of State down to the serving women and men who are so intricately connected operationally in terms of values, logistics, military histories, and aspirations to make this world a better and safer place, this relationship could not be stronger, more positive, or more important.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his intervention today and for supporting the motion. One thing I really want to know from the Liberals is whether they are going to support retroactive pay for those who lost the tax benefit of \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month on September 1, 2016. How soon can we expect this to be fixed so that the remaining 200 troops in Kuwait do not lose those benefits in June?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, yes, the principle of retroactivity is supported in this context. Really, it is to establish fairness to make sure that nobody falls through the cracks with that entitlement. Retroactivity is the mechanism to fix that.

With respect to the implementation of that conclusion, there is a process that involves a number of departments, but it is certainly on the radar, and the government support for the motion exemplifies the priority it has been given. I cannot comment to an exact time frame, but certainly it is in progress.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to today's discussion on how Canada shows support for the members of our Armed Forces. I would like to take a few moments today to highlight some of that work and to remind my fellow members just how integral the Canadian Armed Forces are to our safety and well-being. As parliamentarians, as the representatives of our fellow Canadians, our first responsibility is to those here at home. It is to the safety and security of our country and its citizens and their prosperity.

For the Canadian Armed Forces, the priority is the same. While their international operations tend to get the most attention, there are tens of thousands of military men and women working here at home every day in defence of our country and our continent, on land, at sea, and in the air. The most familiar of these, and one of the most important, is undoubtedly our contribution to the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD. As the world's first and most successful bi-national command, it is an important link with our American friends to the south and a critical piece in the system of systems that defends our airspace and provides surveillance of our maritime approaches. This year, 2017, marks the 60th anniversary of this incredible partnership, and it is only growing stronger as NORAD evolves to deal with the modern security environment.

Canada is also working hard with our allies on several missions. Three have been very much in the news of late. We recently extended our commitment to Operation Unifier in Ukraine. Canada is deploying approximately 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel to Ukraine until the end of March 2019. Through Operation Unifier, we are helping Ukraine build the capabilities it needs to maintain its sovereignty, security, and stability.

Canadian troops are good trainers and mentors, and they are putting those skills to use by sharing their knowledge and expertise with Ukrainian armed forces members. So far we have trained more than 3,200 Ukrainian soldiers, and most of them received tactical infantry training. However, Canada has also delivered more than 90 training programs since the mission began in 2015. Many taught specialized skills and capabilities, such as explosive ordnance disposal, medical training, and my personal favourite, military logistics.

Canada's assistance to Ukraine also includes non-lethal military equipment to enhance the capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces. With more than a million Canadians of Ukrainian descent, we can imagine that this is a mission that is very important to them, but it is also a mission that is important to all Canadians.

Business of Supply

What is happening in Ukraine threatens border security in the region, and it is deeply concerning to our NATO allies in Europe. NATO is a cornerstone of Canada's defence policy, and the strength of the alliance lies in collective defence. Threats to the security of some of our members matter to all members.

Operation Reassurance is Canada's mission in support of our NATO allies and partners in eastern Europe. As part of Operation Reassurance, we participated in NATO Baltic air policing, a defensive mission to protect our allies' airspace. The air task force also deployed on a training mission in Romania, and they worked to improve interoperability with allied air forces. That training is critical to the ability of NATO allies to fight alongside each other. It also gives the Royal Canadian Air Force invaluable experience.

Canada will be deploying another air task force to Iceland and Romania this year. The CF-18s we are sending will continue air policing duties, and they will also continue to train with our allies.

The Royal Canadian Navy has contributed to Operation Reassurance as well. Our maritime task force has kept a constant presence in the region as part of the Standing NATO Maritime Group. HMCS *St. John's* recently replaced HMCS *Charlottetown* as part of our contribution to the Standing NATO Maritime Group, and just last month, HMCS *St. John's* wrapped up three weeks of training in the Black Sea with allied and partner nations.

The last component of Operation Reassurance is the land task force. It first deployed almost three years ago, in May 2014, and the seventh rotation of Canadian soldiers arrived in Poland last month. They are now participating in the multinational exercise Allied Spirit VI, in Germany.

● (1320)

Canada is demonstrating its commitment to NATO by sending our brave women and men in uniform on Operation Reassurance. I think I speak for all of us when I say "Bravo Zulu" for the great work with our allies.

I would like to update the House on Operation Impact, which is our effort to dismantle and defeat Daesh. I think it is clear to the hon. members present that Daesh is a scourge and a threat to regional and international security. We know it, our allies know it, and the world knows it. We are doing our part in the efforts to degrade, and ultimately defeat it.

Joint Task Force-Iraq is responsible for command and control of Operation Impact, as well as for the coordination of operations at coalition headquarters. Joint Task Force-Iraq is collecting and processing intelligence, helping to plan and execute military operations, and facilitating the hosting of a tactical aviation detachment and medical facility.

In the air, the Royal Canadian Air Force has carried out 2,802 sorties from its locations in Kuwait. It has delivered fuel to allied aircraft and has carried out critical reconnaissance flights.

Meanwhile, on the ground, members from the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command are training, advising, and assisting Iraqi forces. They are developing the skills of Iraqi officers so they can effectively fight Daesh and build a more secure country and region.

We must support our soldiers deployed around the world. We must recognize the dangers and discomforts they face. We must compensate them fairly for their sacrifices.

The Department of National Defence has in place an independent and impartial process to ensure that we do. Every member deployed receives a comprehensive compensation and benefits package, and sometimes that package includes a hardship allowance and a risk allowance, two monthly payments to compensate for conditions that are more uncomfortable, more stressful, and more unsafe than those on a base here at home.

We reassess the country's hardship and risk levels on a regular basis. In the meantime, we will ensure that the people who were deployed to Arifjan when the risk level was last assessed will continue to receive the same allowances. We will continue to support our troops. We will continue to provide first-rate compensation and benefits packages. We will continue to ensure that our soldiers benefit personally, professionally, and financially from their hard, much appreciated, and much respected work.

● (1325)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill for her service to Canada when she was in the air force, as well as her husband's. I appreciate her comments about Operation Unifier and Operation Reassurance as deterrence measures against the Russian aggression not only in eastern Europe but particularly in Ukraine. She is married to a good Canadian-Ukrainian boy.

As she was going through all the different missions that were deployed, it was interesting to hear that the Liberals would continue on with our NATO air policing rotations in Iceland and Romania as part of Operation Reassurance measures. It is unfortunate that they did not keep the CF-18s in the fight against ISIS through Operation Impact, which originally were stationed in Kuwait.

As a former serving member, does she believe it was fair that the minister did not use his ministerial authority to stop the clawback of hardship pay and benefits for recognition of the risk the troops were facing and in recognition of the hardship their families were going through as they were deployed overseas? Does she believe the minister should have used that immediately on September 1, as he said he did back in February? Also, does she believe the payment to those troops that are stationed at Camp Arifjan must be retroactive so they receive the same benefits as all of the other troops that were deployed as part of Operation Impact?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for all his hard work in this area. He is definitely committed to our country's defence and is constantly ensuring we have a competent and capable defence system.

Business of Supply

In all honesty, I have a great deal of confidence in the Government of Canada and in the Department of National Defence. I was fortunate enough to be involved on the periphery around the assessments that were made. I have a great deal of confidence in how the organization, pretty much independently and comprehensively, reviews the risk and dangers associated with an operational mission to ensure our soldiers are compensated effectively and adequately.

If we, as elected officials, do not place our confidence in our members and seniors members in uniform to better assess the dangers of an operational mission, particularly relative to the other operational missions, then we have a far more critical situation that we need to address.

I absolutely believe we have a good process. Reviewing the process is also very important, but we need to have confidence in the infrastructure and structure of that process to ensure it is fair and just for all our members in uniform.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have one simple question for my colleague. If Canadian troops are engaged in combat operations against the Islamic State fighters, how can the government justify taking away the combat tax benefit to our deployed troops?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, again, we have an independent committee within the Department of National Defence that assesses the hardships and risks associated with an operational mission, and makes adjustments on a regular basis as that mission and the dangers associated with it change over time. Therefore, when a government minister, a duly elected official, makes a decision based on the recommendation that comes from our government's experts, then that is the best we, as members of Parliament, can and should be responsible for.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today in this debate. I would be remiss if I or any of our colleagues did not recognize that we lost one of our brave men and soldiers. Yesterday Master Corporal Alfred Barr, who was a member of the 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron based in Winnipeg, died in an accident. On behalf of my friends and family, our heartfelt thoughts and condolences go to Master Corporal Barr's family, his friends, and his colleagues. I thank him for his service.

We are here to talk about a serious issue today. Once again, we see the Liberal government shortchange our men and women in uniform by rolling back their tax benefits. The text of the motion before us today reads:

That the House call on the government to show support and appreciation for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces by reversing its decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit which provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

We are taking away money and tax relief to these brave men and women who are serving us, who answer the call without hesitation when the world calls.

I will be splitting my time, Mr. Speaker, with my hon. colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

I have been listening to and following along with the debate throughout the day. I am heartened to hear that the government will

support the motion. I hope that by the end of the day, the Liberals will support the motion in whole and work toward retroactively ensuring that those brave men and women who are there and who had this benefit taken away from them in September will have them reapplied.

However, I am going to stay the course with my speech. Until this motion is passed, it is important that we get on record exactly what we are talking about today.

On September 1, 2016, the Liberal government ended the tax relief measures provided to 15 Canadian troops stationed at the Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. For 300 Canadian soldiers also stationed in Kuwait under Operation Impact, their benefits remained unchanged.

However, in January of this year, the departmental hardship and risk committee announced to the troops in its December 2016 quarterly meeting that all tax relief measures to CAF members deployed to Kuwait under Operation Impact would be cancelled. A bureaucratic change, a stroke of a pen, was going to impact brave men and women who put their uniforms on to serve our country so our flag could stand tall and we could remain free and indeed promote Canadian values abroad. They are facing financial hardship.

The good news is that the change will not take effect until June 1, 2017, allowing time for members and their families to adjust to this decision. How kind of the Liberals. Instead of taking time to reflect on this choice, the Liberals came up with an equally appalling solution. Instead of restoring the benefits that our troops at Camp Arifjan deserved, they decided to revoke the benefit for all our troops that were battling ISIS. I understand, through the debate, that the Liberals are reconsidering and re-examining this, but I would challenge them to agree to our motion and keep this benefit in place.

The arrogance of the Liberal government is unprecedented. The Liberals are rolling back the tax relief for our men and women who protect our Canadian values, those men and women who ensure Canada remains "The True North, strong and free". These men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces volunteer to leave their families as they travel abroad to perform dangerous work and put themselves at risk in the service of our country. They miss important milestones such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, births, and deaths.

Instead of providing compensation that is a drop in the bucket for the tax-and-spend Liberals, they are choosing to take away from those who voluntarily sacrifice their lives. Instead of thanking our troops, they are telling our troops that are deployed to foreign third world countries that they are not in enough danger to justify \$1,500 or \$1,800 a month in additional finances.

Business of Supply

•(1330)

I would like to use statistics because they tell the real story. Here is one for the House. During the last break week, from February 24 to March 5, Liberal MPs travelled throughout Canada on taxpayers' dollars spreading fluff and flowers all across the way and announcing 188 loans, grants, contributions, and government contract awards worth a combined \$1.25 billion. I will repeat that for the record, \$1.25 billion. Now they are going to trumpet it and say that they are spending dollars and they just announced another \$650 million to be spent abroad, when indeed those who are in harm's way here at home and those who are most vulnerable and those who are wearing the maple leaf on their shoulders and protecting and promoting the maple leaf and all of our Canadian values abroad are being told that they are going to receive a pay cut. It is shameful.

The Prime Minister felt it necessary to cut the tax benefits of our military. This is simply unacceptable. The Liberals have known for months now that the Canadian troops who are deployed in the fight against ISIS have not been adequately compensated for the hardships and risks associated with their deployment and yet the decision was still made to cut this financial aid while the troops had already agreed to deploy. In cutting this benefit, the Liberals have cheated our troops and their families out of hard-earned money that they expected and counted on, and most of all, that they deserve.

I was not a part of the last government or the one before that, but all I have heard today and in recent months is that whenever the Liberals have to justify some of the things they are doing, they always like to say that Prime Minister Harper and his government started it and the Liberals are simply following through. They like to point fingers. It is a smokescreen and it is unacceptable. Liberals knew about this. If they believed the words coming out of their mouths, they would stand up for those who are putting their lives in danger for our country and our communities, but I guess it is acceptable to treat our heroes the way the Liberals are treating them.

•(1335)

Last night, something remarkable happened. The House stood in unanimous support of my bill, Bill C-211, and collectively we sent the message that we in the chamber value the brave men and women who serve our country and our communities. Collectively we have provided hope and I look forward to working with all colleagues to ensure Bill C-211 is strengthened where necessary and passed as quickly as possible, because with every minute, every hour, every day wasted, we are losing lives.

Over the course of the preparation for Bill C-211, I heard tragic stories from the men and women who have served our country proudly. Their stories were deeply personal and will sit with me for the rest of my life. I also had the honour of meeting with surviving friends and families of those who we lost in combat and those we lost here at home because we failed to live up to our responsibility in ensuring our soldiers are whole, that they are healthy, that they have every opportunity to integrate back into our communities and to provide for their families. I am going to say again that they are not healthy. There is tremendous stress placed upon our soldiers and their families when they are deployed, emotional, physical, and financial stress. We need to ensure that we provide every tool

possible for our soldiers to be successful in their mission abroad and their mission here at home.

Taking away this tax credit from Canadians who have answered the world's call and are serving our country without hesitation is shameful. It flies against what we all stood together for here last night and against the message that this chamber delivered to all of the Canadians who were tuning in and to members of our armed forces, our brave men and women who put the uniform on every day to serve all of us and our families.

•(1340)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for his bill yesterday. It gave me a good deal of pride to vote for that bill. I serve on the veterans affairs committee and I have been watching a very interesting subject on veterans' suicide. It is meta-traumatizing, if I can call it that, to see what is happening.

From what I understand, the government is committed to providing the retroactive payment today's motion calls for. I am looking to get more information as to what my colleague's concerns are with respect to the motion considering that we are doing what it says.

I want to draw attention to the fact that the Minister of Veterans Affairs was at the veterans affairs committee yesterday talking about how all but two of the veterans offices that had been closed in the last few years have been reopened and the last two are going to be opened in the near future.

I wonder if the member could express his impression of the importance of taking care of our veterans after being in operation as well as while they are in operation.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I am going to apologize. I could not hear all of the member's question. I am not sure whether he was picking something out of his teeth as he was speaking, but it was very jumbled. Perhaps my earpiece was the problem.

Our veterans affairs office in Prince George is being reopened. I heard loud and clear during the course of the campaign that this was something our Legion and the brave men and women in our local area were looking forward to. The government has announced this but we are still waiting. We have heard no date or time frame as to when it is going to be opened. It is a promise that the government made. It is a commitment that it made. An announcement was made that it is going to be reopened but we still have no time frame as to when that will be, so our brave men and women are still waiting for that to happen in my riding.

We should be doing everything we can in a non-partisan way to make sure that we are providing our men and women that serve our communities and serve our country with the tools they need to be successful in their mission. We need to make sure they have the tools they need to be healthy and made whole upon their return and integration back into our communities.

Business of Supply

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up a really good point with respect to the Liberal government. On the one hand it is a big spending government, spending all kinds of new money in all sorts of areas. On the other hand, in some of these vitally important areas which are clearly within the role of the federal government we see it nickel-and-diming. I wonder if the member could reflect on the perversity of this.

On the one hand we have this sort of wide open, will spend any amount of taxpayers' money on anything attitude on things that cover the full gamut, while on vital areas like this which deal with the basic security of Canadians and the strength of our armed forces, we see a completely different approach when it comes to spending.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I will reference the announcement made the other day that \$650 million will be spent overseas. In no way am I devaluing that money and in no way am I devaluing what the government is doing, but the reality is that there are people here at home that could use that money. Organizations and vulnerable sectors of our society could use that money here at home.

We are talking today about the brave men and women who serve our country. On the one hand the government is clawing back \$1,500 to \$1,800 from them and saying they signed up, volunteered, but someone in Ottawa has decided that, sorry, they are not at enough risk. What message does that send? What value proposition message does that send to our brave men and women that they are not worthy of that? They can read the newspapers and listen to the media as much as anybody else. They know that their paycheques are less yet they are still doing the same work that they were asked to do. They are still in harm's way regardless of whether some bureaucrat in Ottawa says it is not as risky as it was first thought. They are still at risk. They are still not at home with their families. They see the value going out the door. They see the money that is being spent overseas, yet it is not going toward helping to protect them and their families. That is shameful.

[Translation]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this very important debate. I would like to congratulate my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. He is working very hard for his riding and for our soldiers.

• (1345)

[English]

This motion deals with a very important issue, and I think it is important for us to take action on it immediately and for the government to take action on it immediately. I will start by reviewing the substance of the motion, and then I will talk about the reasons I think it is important for us to support it and also the action that needs to follow.

This is an opposition motion put forward by the Conservative Party. It calls on the government to restore a tax benefit that is traditionally given to soldiers who are in a dangerous situation in the midst of a deployment. The government removed that money with respect to some of our Canadian Armed Forces involved in the fight against Daesh, and this motion calls for the restoration of that money and, importantly, calls for it to be done on a retroactive basis. It is not

just to restore the payment of that money going forward, but to go back and provide that danger pay that should have been given to our soldiers ever since it was removed.

As we discuss this motion and scrutinize whatever government action comes out of it, it is very important to underline that retroactive component as well. We are not just talking about restoring the payment going forward. On this side of the House, we recognize that an injustice has been done to our brave men and women in uniform, and that injustice needs to be remedied not just going forward but also we need to address the past injustice in the context of the ameliorative action that may be taken as we go forward.

It is our position that this danger pay should not have been cut, and I will identify a number of specific reasons why that is the case.

First of all, this is an issue of basic fairness. I do not mean fairness just in the sort of objective sense of treating people as is due, but I mean fairness specifically in the sense of following through on commitments that have been made. If soldiers are committed to a dangerous deployment with the understanding that they will receive danger pay, and then if that danger pay is withdrawn, in some cases without even giving them a proper level of notice to plan their personal finances accordingly, it is a real injustice. It is an injustice objectively not to pay danger pay in these cases, but also simply in the very specific sense of not following through on commitments that had been made, and not honouring expectations that were put in place. We can see that, yes, this does represent a real injustice.

In general, the government should honour the commitments that it makes to government employees. In particular, when we have soldiers in the midst of a dangerous deployment and are not here in Canada to be involved in advocacy because they are in the field, to then undertake policy changes midstream after they have been deployed that negatively affect them financially, very clearly, members should recognize the fundamental injustice of that. Again, it is an injustice that requires a remedy both going forward and also with what happened in the past. That is why this motion specifically has that retroactive element.

A second reason it was not right for the government to do this and why this needs to be addressed going forward is the issue of the morale of our forces. We have heard on this side of the House some discussion from our troops about the impact the withdrawal of danger pay has had on their morale. It can convey a sense that our soldiers are not being properly supported, and that clearly has a negative effect on morale. It is certainly not a message we want to see sent.

The responsible thing for us to do is to not only support our troops, but also to take every opportunity we have to express our support and not to pursue the kind of policy change that the withdrawal of this danger pay was, which negatively affects the morale of our troops in the midst of an ongoing deployment. This is something that I think we have to be very careful about. The policy direction that was taken just was not right, and we need to see that remedied and addressed again in terms of what happened in the past and also what happens going forward.

Business of Supply

I also want to speak about a related issue, that of fairness. There is the issue of fairness in terms of following through on commitments, but also in recognizing that this is a dangerous situation, and therefore, providing the danger pay that is normally given in the context of proper recognition of the nature of that situation.

In the current context, we are living in a world where there is not quite simply a front line and then anyone behind the front line is not involved in the action. Warfare today is much more complex. We know that all of our troops deployed in the fight against Daesh are facing a great deal of danger from different kinds of attacks they may be subject to. The purpose of danger pay is to recognize the added challenge, stress, and potential impact on them and their families associated with being in this kind of position. It is to recognize that and to properly compensate for it. That is part of the understanding of and the commitment we make to those who are part of our military.

It also reflects basic notions of fundamental justice, that we pay what is due to them in light of the situation we ask them to be in. Therefore, this is fundamentally the right thing to do, to restore this money. This is why we are bringing forward the motion, because it addresses two different issues of fairness. There is fairness in terms of giving what was promised, but also in terms of giving what is due. It is also conducive to strengthening the morale of our armed forces.

In the context of this discussion, there are a couple of general points that should be made about what the debate suggests about where we are at, more broadly, in our political conversations here.

I am frustrated, as a member of the Conservative opposition, to often hear the tendency of the Liberal government to parry proposals for individual specific solutions by saying they are doing a broader review on the subject. This was an issue in a vote that happened last night. Fortunately, we were able to pass the bill on to committee anyway, but the government was opposing the bill, not necessarily because of specific objections to the specific measures but because it said it had to wait for a broader review. Here, again, in the motion, the government is saying it has to look at a broader review when it comes to this area.

What we on this side of the House say is rather than always waiting for that broader review, why not take specific action that is necessary that responds to real issues of justice and fairness in the moment? That is what we have called for. Yes, have that conversation about the broader direction of where we are going in terms of national defence, but this is an issue of basic justice and fairness to our hard-working men and women in uniform, and let us satisfy that obligation. Let us fix that problem now and not parry that with some references to a broader review.

One of the things we see from the government is it is a big-spending government, a government that wants to spend all kinds of taxpayers' money in all kinds of different areas, yet perversely, we see it nickel-and-diming our soldiers in exactly the wrong way and wrong place. This often happens with big-spending governments. They want to spend the cupboard bare, but then they realize that the cupboard is empty when there are important, real priorities that that money needs to be spent on. The reason Conservatives advocate fiscal prudence is precisely so we can invest our resources in those vital areas when they are most needed. That is why we need to be

careful with taxpayers' money, so that we have money available to use when we really need it.

Some members of the government have indicated they intend to support the motion. I welcome that, but motions are ultimately non-binding on the actions of the government, so what we are really looking for is action to implement the fullness of the motion. I hope that if the government chooses to vote for the motion, and if the motion passes the House, that it will have the integrity to implement the fullest of the motion, including the retroactive component, and to ensure that that is implemented as soon as possible. It will have the support of the opposition in moving forward in that direction. It is the right thing to do to address the danger pay issue going forward, but also to remedy it from the past.

• (1350)

I am proud to be supporting this motion and hope that there will be strong action by the government very soon.

• (1355)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if I heard correctly, but I thought the member for Laurentides—Labelle said the government is going to stop imposing this heinous tax on our service people.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that the House agree with the Canadian Judicial Council's recommendation to remove Justice Robin Camp from the Federal Court of Canada and support the government's intent to implement this recommendation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton was asking a question.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I think it is heinous that we are trying to tax our own servicemen, who are risking their lives on behalf of Canadians. I thought that the member for Laurentides—Labelle said that the government is going to fix that.

It is always when Liberals are caught with their hands in the cookie jar that they do a fix. When they were going to impose a Netflix tax, we communicated that to the public, which caused an outcry, and then it was gone. Then they were going to impose a tax on dental and health benefits, we notified the public, there was an outcry, and then that was gone. Now they are taxing servicemen who are putting their lives in danger, we called them to account on it, and now that is gone.

I wonder if the member sees the same pattern of behaviour.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right that we have seen the positive impact of these opposition motions.

Statements by Members

In response to what just happened, I want to say that it is profoundly frustrating, as a member of Parliament, when we are in the middle of a debate on a completely different topic, that a minister asks for unanimous consent on a motion on a completely unrelated subject. The fact of the matter is that, as important as the issue and question is that the justice minister raised, we have a process in this place for having debates, a process that is respectful of the opportunities of individual members to be present when issues come up and to do the research on whatever individual motion may be coming forward.

If there are questions that ministers want to raise, there are, of course, many different ways governments can bring them forward. Governments have opportunities to bring motions for debate. Government ministers have opportunities that other members do not actually have. In the middle of questions and comments on an important discussion about our military, and on an opposition day that there are not many of, for a minister of the crown to take the House by surprise on an issue that I think merits a lot of discussion and to do it in the way it was done is profoundly disrespectful to this institution.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. This may be considered a minor point by members, but I can assure everyone that from a convention standpoint, words are important in the House. Having been a member of the House leader's office for nine years when Conservatives were in government, I can assure all members that when someone stands in the House and says, "Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find unanimous consent", it means that member has had conversations and consultations with every party and they have agreed to it. Those are the words we use.

When strictly trying to seek unanimous consent, a member would say, "I hope members will give unanimous consent for the following motion". I will give the minister credit for the fact that she may not know what she was saying, but I can assure her that the words she used implied that there was a deal, that there was agreement among all parties. There was none, and she should retract those words.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this evening, the Prime Minister is in cowboy country. He is in Texas to receive a big award for his leadership in promoting fossil fuels. Many admirers and partners will be there with him: ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, Enbridge, TransCanada. It will make for some great selfies!

This prestigious award tells us that this Prime Minister is the prime minister of oil companies. He is the prime minister of oil sands, dirty energy and pipelines.

While the polluters are paying tribute to the Prime Minister, I would like to point out that Quebec has chosen green energy and sustainable development. While the Prime Minister gets praised by

the magnates that represent last century's energy source, we have chosen to move forward with 21st-century energy.

The future is Quebec, and that is well worth the top awards.

* * *

● (1400)

GREAT BIG CRUNCH

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today at 2:30 p.m., thousands of children, parents and teachers across the country will bite into an apple to raise all Canadians' awareness about the importance of developing healthy eating habits.

This symbolic gesture is part of the Great Big Crunch, an event organized by FoodShare in partnership with Food Secure Canada and the Coalition for Healthy School Food.

I am proud to be the principal partner for this day for the second year running. I would like to remind you that last year, more than 200,000 Canadians gathered and joined forces to promote healthy eating habits, from field to table.

I will now reiterate my request from last year and invite all my colleagues and all Canadians to take a few moments to think about the benefits of a healthy diet in our day-to-day and the importance of supporting our local producers.

If we all bite into an apple together, we will show all Canadian families that we—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Manning.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is tax time again in Canada. Millions of people are filling out forms and discovering just how much they owe the federal government or just how much the government owes them. They are looking back at 2016 but, in this House, we are looking at the 2017 taxation year, and it is not pretty. Reckless Liberal spending, record deficits, and an ever-increasing national debt means that it is indeed a tax increase in this coming year once again.

Soon the finance minister will table a new budget and Canadians will discover just how much they will have to pay for the spendthrift actions of people who still believe in the tooth fairy and the Easter bunny and that budgets balance themselves.

If I thought it would do any good, I would call on the finance minister to stop this fiscal insanity.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ALCIDE BOUCHER

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was with incredible sadness that I learned of the passing of Alcide Boucher of Bas-Caraquet at the age of 86.

Statements by Members

Mr. Boucher was very involved in his community. He served as a municipal councillor in Bas-Caraquet and a member of the local school board for many years. He also established the Club des amis des jeunes and brought the Scouting movement to Bas-Caraquet.

His generosity and dedication to sports, leisure activities, and young people in our region had a huge impact on their future. He coached many minor hockey and baseball teams. Mr. Boucher also organized a number of fundraising campaigns to provide young people with sports equipment, a skating rink, and a baseball diamond, just to name a few.

A great defender of the French language, a fourth degree Knight of Columbus, and director of C.L. Comeau Ltée for 41 years, Mr. Boucher made huge contributions that will never be forgotten.

I want offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Vina, his 14 children, and his entire family.

* * *

[English]

MARGARET MITCHELL

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to an incredible British Columbian and an incredible parliamentarian. Margaret Mitchell passed away yesterday, on International Women's Day.

Margaret was a champion of women's rights in her 13 years in Parliament, serving the good people of Vancouver East. From before her time here, throughout her entire existence as a member of Parliament, she fought for justice for women. She fought with other MPs from across the aisle to make sure that women's rights were enshrined in our charter, ensuring that generations of women to come would not have to fight the same battles continuously over and over again.

Margaret, if she had been able to attend yesterday and see the Daughters of the Vote take their places in these seats and have their voices heard in Parliament as they were, would have been proud of all of her accomplishments and so many of her colleagues', but she would have wanted more.

She fought for justice for Chinese Canadians and the unfortunate Chinese head tax that was placed upon them. She fought, always, for basic humanity and basic rights for all humans.

* * *

●(1405)

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a fellow member of Parliament from across the floor for his kind act. I thank my colleague, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George, who went above and beyond his typical everyday obligations for one of my constituents, Derek Cassista, of Grand Falls, New Brunswick, who dedicates his life to saving others as a paramedic.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank him, the first responders, firefighters, police officers, paramedics, veterans, and active military personnel I have met with and spoken with about my

colleague's bill on the important issue of PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder.

At the end of the day, strong government requires good opposition. Despite different opinions on various issues, we need to demonstrate that all sides of the House can collaborate and work together for the benefit of all Canadians. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of the House in a manner that exhibits one of our most important national strengths, collaboration.

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NORM BOUCHER

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to address the loss of a local celebrity.

Local historian Norm Boucher passed away in February at the all too young age of 52. The local historian was a beloved and cherished community figure. Mr. Boucher shared most of his work online, where he shared Fort McMurray's natural and historic beauty to over 6,000 followers. The Facebook group displays images of Fort McMurray's natural and historic beauty that date back to the 1900s.

The records show a small town growing into a bustling city. The impact of his passing is certainly felt throughout my riding. His contribution to our community is much appreciated and his legacy will continue to live on in our community for time to come. Norm will be sorely missed

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1847 the Dominion of Canada numbered some 1.5 million people. Yet, small as we were then, we welcomed some 100,000 Irish immigrants, immigrants who were leaving a devastating famine behind them, fleeing terror and persecution.

At the time, Irish immigrants were treated with the same contempt and vitriol that is levied at other immigrants today. "Ignorant", "lazy", newspapers read, "improvident and unthankful" and as "vicious as they are poor". Fenians, Papists, here to impose their own religious law on us all.

Political parties were formed and fuelled for fear of them, for fear of us. Some Irish forget that. I do not. Some 38,000 Irish passed through Toronto in 1847. Toronto, then, was a city of only 20,000 people; and 38,000 were taken in by 20,000 already here. That is what I will remember this St. Patrick's Day.

I will remember that in 1847, there were enough, just enough Canadians who rose above the frank, blatant, decades-long discrimination of the day, and gave those immigrants a chance to become Canadians themselves.

*Statements by Members***AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how often do we hear about the mismatch between jobs and skills? Employers are desperate to find qualified workers, and qualified workers are desperate to find jobs that suit their skill set.

It was therefore an honour and delight to have announced last Friday at Centennial College the federal funding of \$720,000 to the Automotive Industries Association to help address this national labour supply mismatch.

Centennial College is Canada's foremost training facility for the \$21-billion automotive after-market sector. This funding will develop an innovative online portal to connect Canadians to industry jobs. A partnership between Centennial College and the Automotive Industries Association will ensure that the educational and training curriculums will produce a world-class, competitive workforce.

This is a good example of the government and industry working to ensure an important labour issue is addressed.

* * *

• (1410)

ISLAMIC STATE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Daesh militants, dressed as medical staff, attacked a hospital in Afghanistan. The latest reports put the death toll for this attack at 49, although that may continue to rise.

It is difficult to speak about these events. We can speak about violations of human rights, of international law, of international obligations, but I think it is also important that we speak about Daesh in terms of evil, in terms of the transgression of the fundamental norms of civilized humanity. Evil of this sort must be discussed and prevented, but also downgraded and defeated.

Events like these reveal the potential of our species for evil, but also for good. We honour the heroic courage of those on the front lines and behind the line fighting against Daesh who risk their lives in incredibly dangerous situations. To do good in a dangerous world requires heroic courage and a willingness to face confrontation.

My thoughts and prayers, and I am sure those of all members, are with the victims and the survivors of this terrible attack, and all those fighting Daesh today.

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ST PATRICK'S DAY

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to let the members know that March madness in Toronto has begun, and I am not talking about a basketball tournament. I am, of course, talking about the celebration of all things Irish. The Irish community in Etobicoke—Lakeshore in Toronto is large, enthusiastic, hard-working, and a lot of fun. During the month of March, the community gets even bigger because everyone wants to be Irish. Even the Conservatives want to be green this month.

Festivities began on Sunday with the raising of the Irish flag at Toronto City Hall, which was followed by the Irish person of the year luncheon. Congratulations to this year's recipient, Colm

Wilkinson. Over the next 10 days, Toronto will host the Ireland Fund of Canada's annual St. Patrick's Day luncheon, which is the largest event of its kind in the world with over 1,000 people. This is followed by the Grand Marshal Ball, the St. Patrick's Day parade, and a few other events tossed in for good measure. Members should come to Toronto for March madness.

[Member spoke in Erse as follows:]

Ceol agus craic. Sláinte.

[English]

* * *

ALFRED BARR

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Master Corporal Alfred Barr of the Royal Canadian Air Force's 435 Transportation and Rescue Squadron based out of Winnipeg was tragically killed in a training accident near Yorkton, Saskatchewan. As a reservist and former full-time member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I, along with many other members of this House, know the importance that the uniform carries and the weight that it bears on their families, friends, and communities.

Every day men and women of our search and rescue community don their uniforms and risk their lives to fulfill their motto, "That others may live".

Yesterday's loss is a reminder of the selflessness and sacrifice that exemplifies their profession and the professionalism of all members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

On behalf of all of my colleagues, I offer my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Master Corporal Barr and to the search and rescue community in which he proudly served.

* * *

[Translation]

ALEX HARVEY

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me talk to you today about an extraordinary Quebec athlete, Alex Harvey.

This cross-country skier from Saint-Ferréol-les-Neiges thrilled Canadians across the country last Sunday when he won the gold medal at the World Ski Championships in Finland.

The 50 kilometre freestyle is the most challenging of all the events, and Alex successfully completed this physical and mental challenge by clocking in at one hour, 46 minutes and 28 seconds, six-tenths of a second ahead of Russian competitor Sergey Ustiugov.

Statements by Members

This was the first time in history that a Canadian won a medal in the 50 kilometre freestyle. You could hear the crowd cheering on Alex, a little guy from here who became nothing less than a world champion.

In carrying out such a feat, Alex Harvey has made his parents, coaches, family and sponsors proud, but above all, he has shown the rest of the world that cross-country skiing is not just part of Scandinavian history; it's also important to Canadians.

Congratulations, Alex. We are all proud of you, and we wish you every success for the rest of the season.

* * *

[*English*]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we progress towards gender equality here we must remember the plight of refugee and migrant women and girls worldwide.

Of the 65 million people displaced by conflict, 55% are women and children. Displaced women and girls often experience rape, forced marriages, and sexual slavery.

[*Translation*]

In addition to the risks to which all refugees are exposed, women and girls are exposed to sexual abuse by the authorities. Migrant camps offer little security or health care, and women do not have the benefit of the security afforded by proper identification.

In host countries, these women can be isolated by the pressure to maintain their sexual identity. This isolation limits their access to language and vocational training, as well as their economic security.

• (1415)

[*English*]

As we laud our own progress, let us remember that women's rights are human rights, and we cannot celebrate fully until all women enjoy those rights.

* * *

[*Translation*]

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TRE COLORI RESTAURANT

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this year Chambly will be celebrating an important anniversary. The Tre Colori restaurant is turning 50. Established in 1967 by Joseph Petrozza, the restaurant is now run with love and passion by his sons Joey, Roberto, and Tony.

Whether you want a good pizza delivered on a Friday night or you want to sit down for a good meal, with a nice glass of wine of course, the Tre Colori is a fixture in Chambly.

The Petrozza brothers even received a consumer choice award in the restaurant category for Montreal's south shore, a well-deserved honour.

Not only does this family serve excellent food, it is also very involved in the community. Whether it is the Festival multicultural

de Chambly or the annual fundraising dinner for the Centre d'écoute Montérégie, the Petrozza family never hesitates to invest in its community.

It is a pleasure for me to wish them a happy 50th anniversary and, above all, 50 more years of good food and good cheer.

Grazie!

* * *

[*English*]

ALFRED BARR

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so deeply saddened to rise in the House today in response to a tragedy that took place in my riding yesterday. We lost a young Winnipeg-based Royal Canadian Air Force search and rescue technician in a training accident near Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Master Corporal Alfred Barr was a member of 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron.

I want to express my deep, heartfelt condolences to Master Corporal Alfred Barr's family, friends, and fellow service members on behalf of the people of my riding and my colleagues here. Master Corporal Alfred Barr was a member of the search and rescue community that takes risks every day in all kinds of circumstances to help their fellow Canadians.

Our thoughts, prayers, and condolences are with Master Corporal Barr's family, friends, and fellow service members.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister of National Defence, who has recognized the government's responsibility to support the survivors, their families and the estates of those who died from the accidental explosion of a grenade at Valcartier in 1974. Six young Canadians died that day, and many others sustained terrible injuries.

I would like to acknowledge the courage of the cadets, instructors, first responders and all those who rushed to the room immediately after the explosion.

Let us recognize the team spirit of the group of cadets and advocates who worked on the claim for 43 years. Their efforts and leadership have eased a lot of suffering. They deserve the nation's gratitude. My heart goes out to those who have shouldered the burden of this terrible chapter in Canadian history, and I can only hope that today's announcement will help them find closure.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***TAXATION**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister has now written and rewritten his budget a few times. It seems he cannot quite find the right way to tell Canadians he wants more of their money.

With Mr. Trump moving to drastically reduce taxes, what businesses need to hear is that we will do the same thing here in Canada to create jobs. Lowering taxes to compete with the United States should be done in this budget, and the sooner the better. What is the Prime Minister's plan to make sure that Donald Trump does not steal our jobs?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, budget 2016 invested in jobs, growth, infrastructure, and innovation and it cut taxes for Canada's middle class. The Conservatives voted against those tax cuts. Furthermore, it invested in a Canada child benefit that is lifting 300,000 Canadian kids out of poverty. Canadians can be assured that budget 2017 will continue to invest in a pro-growth, pro-middle-class agenda that will be good for the Canadian economy.

• (1420)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is making Canada a less attractive place to do business and create jobs every single day. Business investment has fallen every single quarter since the Prime Minister took office, and when people are not investing in our economy, jobs are not created. It is about to get worse as Donald Trump lowers taxes and cuts red tape while the Prime Minister is going in the exact opposite direction.

Will the Prime Minister wake up, lower taxes, cut red tape, and protect Canadian jobs?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to talk about jobs, so let us talk about jobs. There have been 286,000 jobs created since the Liberals formed government. These jobs are being created across the country. Let me highlight a few key examples because of our policies. We worked with Bell Helicopter to secure 900 jobs and, more important, create an additional 100 new jobs. GE invested in Welland to create 220 jobs. Thomson Reuters is investing in up to 1,500 jobs. GM Canada hired 1,000 new engineers. There are more jobs to come.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are mostly part-time jobs and this is a serious issue that is coming up in this next budget.

Small businesses are bracing for this next budget. They already know that they have been hit by the Prime Minister's carbon tax, the EI hike, the CPP tax hike, and his cancellation of the small business hiring credit. At the same time, they are worried about the impact of Donald Trump's low tax rates. Small businesses are the backbone of

our economy, and yet the Prime Minister just keeps taxing them more and more.

When will the Prime Minister give small businesses a break?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate rising in this House to remind members as well as Canadians that we take our small businesses very seriously. Yes, they are the backbone of the economy. We know that through our investments and through our plan they will be able to be more productive, more innovative, and export-oriented. Small businesses want to export, so we are creating the conditions to make it easier. If we look at the accelerated growth service, we are looking at the high-impact, high-growth firms and giving them catered services so that they can actually advance the services and products that they have. We will continue to work hard for small businesses.

* * *

*[Translation]***FINANCE**

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget will not be balanced until 2055.

That means my 15-year-old daughter, who is listening to us online today, will be 53 by the time the government gets public finances under control. That means our kids will pay for the Liberal deficit. If nothing changes, my daughter will have to pay extra taxes for 38 years because of the Liberal government's irresponsibility.

What does the Prime Minister have to say to my daughter, who is listening to us right now?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in budget 2016, we invested in jobs, middle-class growth, infrastructure, and innovation. We cut taxes for the middle class and introduced the Canada child benefit.

The economy has improved, but we still have work to do. We have to keep making major investments in the middle class to generate economic growth for all Canadians.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about economic growth.

According to the business community, through a recent report by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and I quote, "Small business owners know that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes." They believe that the government should commit to eliminating the deficit in five years, not 38.

I talked about our children earlier, and now I want to talk about our job creators, who are also extremely worried. The last thing they need is more taxes and larger deficits.

What does the Prime Minister have to say to them today? They are listening to us today, too.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a good day, because we made an announcement today.

Working together to invest in our Canadian entrepreneurs, we are investing not only in the Canadian economy, but also in our future. The funding announced today will support business expansion. It will support the women and men who are working hard to develop businesses and create even more jobs for the middle class across the country.

We will continue to work very hard for small and medium-sized businesses.

* * *

● (1425)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security will be in Ottawa tomorrow for meetings with the government, including the Minister of Public Safety. Ever since President Trump came into power, at least three Quebecers have been turned away at the U.S. border.

Can the minister confirm that he is going to discuss the specific cases of Canadians turned away at the border when he talks to John Kelly and ensure that there will be no further impact on Canadians who want to visit the United States?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I will not speak to a specific case, our expectation on both sides of the border is that travellers will be treated with respect and in accordance with the rule of law. To facilitate smooth passage at the border, travellers who are aware of issues related to mistaken identity are encouraged to communicate with American authorities in advance.

Officials from Canada Border Services Agency and U.S. customs and border protection are in continuous contact on these matters and the issues related to travellers' screening will be discussed tomorrow in the meeting with the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister will not speak about specific cases, but I hope tomorrow they will raise those specific cases with the Secretary of Homeland Security.

Still at the border, hundreds of asylum seekers have crossed into Canada in recent months and many are risking their lives in harsh winter weather. On Tuesday, a pregnant woman and a toddler crossed into Emerson during a winter storm.

We can no longer have confidence that refugees in the United States have access to a fair process, so will the minister finally do the right thing and immediately suspend the safe third country

agreement with the U.S. to allow these people to cross safely while seeking asylum in Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's refugee system is lauded around the world for being one of the most compassionate. The safe third country agreement is an agreement between the United States and Canada to properly manage asylum seekers. The member opposite should know that the UN refugee agency supports the principle behind the safe third country agreement to prevent asylum shopping. If the New Democratic Party members are prepared to engage in an argument with the UNHCR, they are more than welcome to do so.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the United States signalled its priorities in regard to NAFTA. It has indicated its number one priority involves sourcing auto parts at home. This would have a huge impact on Canada's auto sector which is deeply integrated with its North American counterparts, and still the Liberal government remains silent on its NAFTA priorities.

Will the minister ensure that any NAFTA renegotiations will protect Canada's auto jobs and respect the sector's integrated nature?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to assure the member opposite that I will fight for precisely that. I have had several meetings with labour representatives, with representatives of our auto parts sector, and we are very aligned on fighting for a great deal for Canada. I am confident we can do it, because that is our government's record on trade. We have overturned discriminatory COOL legislation in the United States. We persuaded Mexico and China to end their bans on Canadian beef. We convinced China to lift its embargo on our canola, and exports of Canadian canola have more than doubled since October.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not delighted or reassured by the minister's talking points. The U.S. Secretary of Commerce said very clearly that Canadians know "times are different", and that they know "they're going to have to make concessions". Concessions? There is too much at stake for Canadian workers. The tone has changed from a tweak to a threatening big bazooka, and apparently the Prime Minister still has nothing to say.

Canadians need to know that their government is going to fight for their jobs. What is the government going to bring to the table during NAFTA renegotiations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by reminding the member opposite and everyone in the House that NAFTA negotiations have not yet begun and now is not the time for us to prematurely lead our cards on the table.

Oral Questions

I want to assure everyone that we will continue to get a great deal for Canadians and our record proves it. Let me share some great news. In January, Canada posted its third straight trade surplus. The drivers of our strong export performance included the car sector where exports were up 7.7%.

* * *

● (1430)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are clearly feeling the pressure to increase defence spending. Reports this week noted that the Liberals are actually going to spend less on defence, but they are planning on cooking the books in hopes of fooling our NATO allies. Instead of including the Coast Guard's budget in defence spending, which is nothing more than just a shell game, the Liberals should pay our troops what they deserve when they are out there fighting ISIS.

Will the minister stop playing shell games with our defence spending and retroactively pay back all the danger pay? I mean retroactively pay it all back to all our troops who are stationed in Kuwait.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows my strong will and desire, as well as our government's desire, to make sure that our troops who are deployed get all the benefits they want.

However, if the member wants to bring up certain facts, what about the deficit reduction plan that the previous government had, which cut billions of dollars from defence? This is one of the reasons why we launched the defence policy review, to look at a thorough plan for the next 20 years, which will look at the proper defence investment that will look after our troops into the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that the Liberals like to throw money around. Now, they are showing us the dark side we know them to have by cheaping out on CF members who are fighting ISIS. They are taking \$1,800 a month away from them. That is pretty shameful, thank you very much. We are talking about a significant amount for military spouses, who must make ends meet in their absence.

Who in this government thinks it is a good idea to take \$1,800 a month away from military spouses?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the passion he has for our troops, and I think we all share that.

When it comes to looking after our troops, as I stated, we want to look after our troops who are not only in Operation Impact but in other operations as well. As I stated, we have launched a review.

I wish members opposite had had the same level of compassion and desire they have now when they were actually in government, to make sure that our troops were not sent without the tax-free allowance.

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the report written under the direction of the former parliamentary budget officer was released this week. It said that "The magnitude of the government's two-year program spending increase is unprecedented in modern times," with a 12% increase in spending over this period. It goes on to say:

If interest rates increase or economic growth further weakens relative to planning assumptions, young people will be paying dearly for today's deficit-financed activities.

The finance minister is grasping for Canadians' wallets to pay the bills for all of this out-of-control spending. How much exactly will the federal government raise in new revenues from its proposed carbon tax?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, even though I do not agree with the premise of it.

Our government is committed to helping middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join the middle class. I will tell members what we have done thus far.

So far, we have lowered taxes for middle-class Canadians. We have put in place a historic agreement called the Canada child benefit program, which has lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. We have helped our seniors by putting in place an increase in the guaranteed income supplement.

We are supporting Canadians. We are going in the right direction, and we are going to continue to do so.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the *Financial Post* today has a headline: "Bank for International Settlements says Canada is showing early warning signs of financial crisis". The article goes on to say that:

In its fall report, the BIS indicated that Canada had one of the highest credit-to-GDP ratios among developed nations. That report said the country's "unusually" elevated level posed a threat to the country's banking system.

Our country has the highest level of household debt to income in the OECD. When will the government realize that Canadians have too much debt of their own and they cannot afford the government?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I always appreciate the opportunity to tell Canadians the good work that this government has been doing. Our priority for this government is to help middle-class Canadians, those who are working so hard to join the middle class, and the most vulnerable Canadians. I want to give the member a few more detailed examples of the things we have done.

When we look at the Canada child tax benefit program, we see that more than 300,000 children will be lifted out of poverty. With respect to our increase in our guaranteed income supplement for low-income seniors, we will be providing assistance to more than one million seniors who will benefit from this raise.

Oral Questions

We are going in the right direction. We are focused and we are moving ahead. [English]

• (1435)

The Speaker: If the members for Cape Breton—Canso and Vancouver Kingsway want to have a discussion, maybe they should do that outdoors; otherwise, I hope they will listen to the questions and answers for the rest of question period. I know it is a friendly conversation, but still.

The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to deliverology, we know that so far the Liberal government has delivered over \$25 billion in debt this year and is working hard to do so in the next. What we do not know is when the government will ever return to a balanced budget. The finance department report, which the minister intentionally delayed, says 2050 or 2051.

When will the government balance the budget?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I am proud to rise in the House.

Budget 2017 will continue to build on our promise to help middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join them. We want to focus on economic growth for our country and for Canadians. We are going to continue to invest in middle-class Canadians because we know they are the backbone of our economy and we truly want to make sure they receive the help they need.

This government is focused. We are going in the right direction, and we are moving ahead.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer did anything but tell Canadians when the Liberal government will return to the balanced budgets that they have promised.

Does the finance minister really believe that saddling our children's children with massive amounts of long-term debt is how we really help the middle class? Not only were previous Conservative and Liberal finance ministers proud to talk about balanced budgets, but they actually delivered.

Why is a balanced budget now a dirty word to the finance minister and to the Liberals?

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank my hon. colleague for the question. In budget 2017, we will continue to focus on helping the middle class and those working hard to join it. Also, we will focus on economic prosperity for all of Canada.

Our government listens to Canadians. We are heading in the right direction and will continue with our plan to help them.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we were sickened to hear the views expressed by Senator Beyak on residential schools.

Residential schools were profoundly damaging to first nations and remain a dark chapter in Canada's history. Children were forcibly taken from their families and homes for the exact purpose of trying to wipe out their languages and their identities.

Will the government stand with us to condemn and denounce the statements made by Senator Beyak?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. Residential schools were a dark and painful chapter in our history, and comments like these are ill-informed, offensive, and simply wrong. The intention of Indian residential schools was to erase indigenous language and culture.

The senator's comments underscore the need for better education, so that all Canadians can work together to advance the shared journey of reconciliation.

Survivors, families, and communities are still dealing with the intergenerational trauma resulting from Indian residential schools. We must all be united in supporting them.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments. I too was shocked and disgusted when I heard the senator's remarks. Residential schools sought to forcibly remove me from my family, culture, language, and land with the clearly expressed goal of wiping me out. In other words, the Indian residential schools were a genocide. There is never a good or justified side to genocide.

I know that the minister joins me in condemning these remarks, but that is not enough. Will the minister join me in calling for the senator's immediate resignation?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his vigilance and leadership in all matters pertaining to residential schools and indigenous peoples. It is very important to leave it to indigenous peoples to decide whether to call for an apology or a resignation. It is up to the indigenous peoples.

Oral Questions

• (1440)
[English]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no wonder the transport minister could not answer my questions yesterday. It is the finance minister who is calling the shots. We now know the airports are on a fire sale to foreign buyers to fund his infrastructure bank because his runaway spending has drained the treasury. Canadian travellers will now be forced to pay higher costs and more fees to foreign airport owners to pay for the Liberals' reckless spending.

Will the minister or anybody on that side finally admit that the airports are being sold solely because they have run out of money?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this offers me another opportunity to point out something that I began pointing out last November, and that is that it is of the highest priority that we improve passenger service in the country. We are trying to lower prices. We are trying to offer more choice. We are trying to reduce the amount of time to go through security, or to go through customs, and yes, we are committed to a regime of rights for air passengers. Those are the factors that guide us in our decisions with respect to airports and airlines.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the Minister of Transport's distress. The Liberal government has been spending recklessly since it came to power. According to certain sources, the government is preparing to sell airports to finance its infrastructure bank scheme.

Now that the Minister of Transport has realized that the bank machine is out of money, he is going to sell the furniture to pay the interest on the Minister of Finance's credit card.

Instead of having a fire sale on March 22, will the government put its finances in order and present Canadians with a plan to balance the budget?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I thank my colleague for the question because it gives me the opportunity to reiterate that our highest priority is improving passenger service.

I think that people are beginning to notice that costs are going down and that they have more choice. They know we want to reduce the time it takes to go through security or customs. Furthermore, there will be a regime of rights for air passengers. That is what is important for our airports and that is what guides us.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Alberta NDP is using money from the building Canada plan as its own personal slush fund. Instead of funding key infrastructure projects like roads, bridges, and water treatment plants, Premier Notley is withholding \$300 million from rural municipalities to pay for her massive debt, and the Liberal infrastructure minister is letting her get away with it.

When will the minister put aside his friendship with Premier Notley? When will he stand up for Albertans? When will he demand that money from the building Canada plan go directly to municipalities, so we get the best bang for the taxpayers' buck?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the challenges facing Alberta, and we will continue to deliver on our infrastructure commitments to invest and support economic growth and improve our communities. Working with our provincial and municipal partners, we are improving transit, roads, bridges, and water systems in Alberta for Albertans. We have approved 127 projects worth \$1.36 billion in federal funding and \$4.2 billion in combined funding. This is what we are delivering for Albertans and will continue to deliver for Albertans.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if they understand the challenges, they better do something about it. Yesterday, the minister said "...federal infrastructure dollars can only be used for infrastructure projects", but the AUMA is clear: the Alberta NDP is breaking the commitment of \$300 million for infrastructure projects in local communities.

Albertans need infrastructure. Albertans need jobs. Albertans need a minister who will stop betraying them. When will the minister stop defending the Alberta NDP and call on Premier Notley to use building Canada funds for community infrastructure and nothing else?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister and the ministry have a strong working relationship with the Government of Alberta, the AUMA, the AAMDC, and mayors from across the province. The ministry values the opportunity to meet with communities and talk about their infrastructure priorities.

As I mentioned previously, there are 127 projects that will benefit communities all across the province, a number of which—if not most of which—are in some of the main municipalities. We will continue to deliver for Albertans. We will continue to deliver quality jobs for the 21st century and for all Albertans. That is what we are going to do in this government.

* * *

• (1445)

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, things are not going well at the Canada Revenue Agency. It is a sinking ship.

First came the private receptions and amnesty for fraudsters. Now, we have learned that many CRA employees are jumping ship to go and work at KPMG. There is a revolving door between the Canada Revenue Agency and the country's accounting firms. A new ship's captain was appointed a year and a half ago, but still nothing has changed.

Oral Questions

When will the minister put an end to the appalling cronyism in her own department?

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency has very strict post-employment policies for employees who leave positions with the Government of Canada.

When they leave their jobs, former CRA employees must meet strict requirements. Information disclosure is prohibited by law indefinitely. CRA employees could be subject to sanctions, including fines and prison time.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to going after rich tax cheats, the motto of the Liberals seems to be “hear no evil, see no evil”. When the sweetheart amnesty deal was exposed, the one between the Liberal government and KPMG, the Liberals refused to even condemn it. When we tried to get key documents from KPMG at committee, the Liberals blocked it.

However, now the Minister of National Revenue is speculating that charges may in fact be brought: “you know, one day, maybe, wink, wink”. Canadians are tired of having to pick up the tab for rich tax deadbeats.

Which is it? Will the Liberals be pressing charges in the KPMG scam, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to pass a message on to Canadians.

In last year's budget, our government invested a historic \$444 million. Over the past year, that money has allowed us to recover \$13 billion, which will be reinvested in health care, education, and infrastructure. We will keep working for Canadians, as we promised.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are deeply concerned about the way sexual assault victims are treated in our criminal justice system.

Earlier today, the Canadian Judicial Council released its report into Justice Robin Camp's conduct in relation to a sexual assault trial. The council has recommended that Justice Camp be removed from office.

Could the minister inform the House about next steps in this matter?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm today that I received a report from the Canadian Judicial Council, which found Justice Robin Camp acted in a manner that seriously undermined public confidence in the judiciary. The council recommended the removal of Justice Camp from the Federal Court.

I have read both reports and have satisfied myself that Justice Camp was afforded due process. We have considered all the factual and legal findings and are prepared to move on this. I understand there might be some news in this regard with respect to Justice Camp, but our government is committed to moving forward with the removal of Justice Camp.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have countless judicial vacancies and unfilled watchdog positions, and we have ambassador appointments that have been downgraded to special advisers. All these failed appointments have one thing in common: the former director of appointments to the Prime Minister, Mary Ng.

It seems the only nomination Mary Ng was able to fulfill was her own Liberal Party candidacy and members of the immigration board, whose independence she has compromised by claiming she has political control over them.

How can Canadians have any confidence in the Liberal appointments when they are so shrouded in Liberal politics?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the new government-wide appointments process that we introduced. It is open, transparent, and merit-based. This appointment process allows Canadians from coast to coast to apply. All positions are available online. It is exactly what we committed to Canadians. It is exactly what we have delivered on. I encourage Canadians to apply.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any government appointments to senior positions must be impartial, based on competence and merit. However, the appointments that this prime minister has made since coming to office are proving otherwise.

Can the Prime Minister assure us that he will not, once again, appoint Liberal cronies who have paid into the party's campaign fund? Will he fill commissioners' positions responsible for overseeing elections, official languages, lobbying and, ironically, ethics—a file he has not mastered—with competent individuals without any ties to the Liberal Party of Canada?

● (1450)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we promised Canadians, we introduced a new government-wide appointment process that is open, transparent, and based on merit. This approach will help us find high-quality candidates, while promoting gender equality and Canadian diversity. All open positions are available in a transparent manner, online. I encourage Canadians to apply.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that governing is hard, and there is more to it than taking selfies and holding hands. The Liberals have failed to make a single parliamentary watchdog appointed in their 18 months in government. It seems the only appointments the government can make are to friends and former chiefs of staff.

Eighteen months have passed. How much longer do we have to wait for the Prime Minister to start doing his job and appointing people to these watchdog positions? Or is it taking so long because he is trying to find people who will turn the other cheek to his ethical transgressions?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also agree that every member in the House works very hard, just like every Canadian in the country works very hard. That is why our government is committed to working hard for middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join it.

I am always proud to stand in the House and remind Canadians, and all members, that we have introduced a new government-wide appointment process that is open, transparent, and merit-based. Our approach will result in the recommendation of highly qualified candidates who achieve gender parity and truly reflect Canada's diversity. The new selection process reflects the fundamental role that many Canadians play—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is under multiple investigations. He refuses to answer questions about his ethical shortcomings. The Minister of Innovation was forced to admit that he misled Canadians over the Anbang boondoggle. The Minister of Finance is engaged in a carbon tax cover-up and the secret sell-off of airports.

When will the Prime Minister finally act like a leader and be honest with Canadians instead of thinking he is above the law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said time and time again that he will respond to any questions the commissioner has.

This government is committed to working hard for middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join it. That is why we lowered taxes on the middle class. That is why we introduced the Canada child benefit, which helps families with children who need it the most. That is why we recognize we can have a sustainable environment as well as a strong economy. They go hand in hand. We need to continue working hard. I encourage all members to let us work better together.

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FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, three of the retirement homes purchased by Anbang, a Chinese insurance company, are in my riding on Vancouver Island. American

companies have refused to work with Anbang because of its murky ownership, yet the Liberals rubber-stamped the deal.

British Columbians demand greater transparency when publicly funded assets are sold to foreign interests. Our health care should not be for sale, and this takeover does not pass the smell test.

I have a simple question. If the Liberals are so confident about this sketchy deal, will they guarantee our seniors that they will not be negatively affected by this deal?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like assure the member that the concerns he is raising are the same concerns we had. That is why we were engaged with the British Columbia government and health authority. They provided the operating licences based on those same concerns, which is making sure Retirement Concepts, which is managed and operated by Canadians, will ensure it provides a level of service and quality to those seniors at the highest level.

Again, the bottom line here is that this is good for investment. This is good for British Columbia. This is good for the economy, and of course for seniors.

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*[Translation]***HEALTH**

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister does not want to bring forward the independent committee's deadline of December 2018 to consider advance requests for assisted dying.

In Quebec, a parliamentary committee and the Collège des médecins du Québec have already expressed support for this. While this government waits, families are suffering to the point of ending the lives of their loved ones.

Will this government finally accept its responsibilities and immediately call for the tabling of a report on advance requests?

● (1455)

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as all members of the House know, earlier last year we introduced legislation, which passed and received royal assent, allowing Canadians to have access to medical assistance in dying. Through that legislation we were able to allow Canadians access to that right, while at the same time recognizing there were vulnerable people who needed to be protected.

By all accounts that I have had with medical practitioners and medical regulators, the system is working well. We are continuing to track that. We also have a review under way to address some of the questions that were raised in the House during that consideration, and we look forward—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, headlines are telling us that the crown attorneys in Alberta are having to accept plea deals on criminal cases because of the judicial backlog. Today, the paper in Ottawa said that there were 1,000 cases that were in jeopardy of being thrown out. In large part, this is because of the Liberal inaction in this area.

If 1,000 cases is not enough to get the government moving to make judicial appointments, how many would it take? How about 5,000? Would that be enough for the government?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand to speak to the substantive and quality judicial appointments we have made, and to speak to the substantive and quality judicial appointments we will continue to make.

I am pleased that we have introduced a new judicial appointment process, and instituted a new composition for judicial advisory councils that will provide us recommendations and highly recommended candidates to fill the seats on the superior courts across the country.

We are taking the necessary time to ensure that the judges who are appointed to the superior courts reflect the diversity of the country and are of the utmost merit and ability.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians courts are at a tipping point, prosecutors are dropping serious criminal cases because they lack resources to meet deadlines, and the Minister of Justice has failed to fill more than 60 judicial vacancies, resulting in serious criminal cases being thrown out of court.

Could the minister tell us how many cases are going to be thrown out of court before she finally gets her act together and starts appointing judges?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I am pleased to stand to speak to the substantive appointments we have made in judicial appointments to superior courts across the country.

We are continuing to ensure we make quality appointments that reflect the diversity in our country. That is why we instituted a new judicial appointments process. That is why we have reconstituted the judicial advisory committees to ensure we have substantive, quality, credible candidates who I can put forward, again reflecting the diversity of the country and the makeup of our great nation.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is trying to keep at least one election promise, and he is moving forward with legislation to legalize marijuana.

Marijuana edibles, such as lollipops, brownies, cookies, and candies, are directly targeting Canadian youth and are currently the number one sales item at illegal dispensaries. How can Canadians trust the Prime Minister to protect our children under more liberalized laws when he refuses to protect them when marijuana is illegal?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the members of the House are familiar with the fact that we will be introducing legislation this spring. It will have to do with the

Oral Questions

legalization of access to cannabis under a regulatory regime that will restrict access and will address the very issues the member has raised to ensure that cannabis stays out of the hands of children and the profits out of the hands of criminals.

I encourage all members to read the task force and make sure they are well informed.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on July 30, 1974, a tragic accident befell cadets attending camp on the Valcartier base. A live grenade exploded inside a barracks packed with more than 130 cadets, killing six of them and injuring dozens more. The lives of many Canadians were changed forever.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell the House what has been done to ensure that survivors of this terrible tragedy receive adequate care and support?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier today, I am truly sorry for the pain endured by victims of this tragedy, and I deeply regret how long it has taken to address it.

That is why we are taking action. In recognition of their pain and suffering, they will receive a universal benevolent payment and are eligible for an individualized payment to cover any physical or mental injuries they may have endured.

For the former cadets who are here today and those who could not be here, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I ask them to accept this apology. We are truly sorry for the pain they have endured, and we deeply regret how long it took to address it.

[Translation]

We are sorry.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

TAXATION

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to make life unaffordable for Canadian families. With previous tax hikes that have taken place, it leaves us wondering, with the minister saying that everything is on the table, what is next for our Canadian families.

Stories are coming out every day with regard to potential tax hikes that we could be facing in this upcoming budget. What I would like to know today is whether our children are in fact going to be kept safe.

I have asked this before and I am asking it again today. Could the Minister of Finance tell us that he will not touch the registered education savings plan?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always pleased to have an opportunity to tell the House about the wonderful work the government is doing to support middle-class Canadians and middle-class families.

It is this government that has put in place the Canada child benefit program that has helped hundreds of thousands of children get out of poverty. It is this government that has invested significantly in creating more summer jobs for students.

Our government is committed to helping Canadians, and that is exactly what we are going to be continuing to do in budget 2017.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are seeing that our oil spill response is anything but world class. The B.C. diesel spill had a radius of over five kilometres and contaminated the clams in the region. First nations communities are exhausted and feel abandoned by the government's inaction. One expert said, "The diesel is not going to disappear magically". Another asked, "If we can't clean that up, then how does that speak to our capacity to deal with large ocean-going tankers with heavy fuel products?"

Can the Liberal government explain the nine-hour delay and why it simply gave up?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the protection of Canadian waters is of the utmost importance to our government. Within an hour and 20 minutes of the initial call, the Coast Guard tasked assets to respond to this incident. The Coast Guard has also established a unified command collaboratively with members of local first nations, federal and provincial partners, and the responsible party. Despite their quick response, incidents like this highlight why our government is investing in marine safety with a \$1.5-billion oceans protection plan, which will make Canada's marine safety systems even stronger than they are today.

* * *

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's marketplace is a rapidly changing environment, and Canada is uniquely positioned to attract and develop talent to further sustain and scale up innovative companies across our country. The government has been clear about the need to grow our economy and create jobs, jobs that will allow our companies to expand and succeed.

Can the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development explain to the House what this government is doing to increase, develop, train, and grow our Canadian talent?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for New Brunswick Southwest for her leadership on this file. As the member well knows, we are in a global innovation race.

That is why we are open to trade, investment, and people. Today we announced the launch of the global skills strategy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, who will reduce the visa processing time to two weeks for Canadian businesses. This will allow Canadian companies to grow and create Canadian jobs across all regions and all sectors. This is good for growth. This is good for high-quality jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we must create permanent jobs.

This government is doing nothing meaningful to help regional economies. It has done nothing about softwood lumber. Worse yet, our Prime Minister naively gave the President of the United States the upper hand on NAFTA. The Liberal government should be supporting our regions and giving hope to the people who have made such significant contributions to the prosperity of this great country.

Does the government want to shutter our regions? If not, it must act now.

● (1505)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first response to the Conservatives in a few days, I would like to begin by thanking the members for Thornhill and Parry Sound—Muskoka for comments they made this week.

We do not always agree, but I am proud that Canada has an official opposition that can rise above partisanship to defend our democracy. Thank you very much.

With respect to NAFTA, negotiations are not yet under way, but Canada will be ready if and when they happen.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we knew that there was \$92 million in contracts and that the government is a good partner of KPMG.

However, now we are learning that the government is not just giving money to KPMG, it is also giving it employees. For the director general of the Institute on Governance, this can create an appearance of cronyism. Frankly, when it comes down to it, they are not just buddies anymore, they are family.

How can the minister claim that the government is going to war with tax cheats, when that same government is providing those who encourage fraud with its money and expertise?

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our government is very proud to have announced in its last budget a \$444-million investment that enabled us to look abroad for \$13 billion, including \$1 billion from voluntary disclosure programs.

We have hired 100 auditors. We work on four jurisdictions per year. We will continue what we started and we will see it through.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about KPMG.

To recap, KPMG hires experts from the Canada Revenue Agency, and at the same time, the Canada Revenue Agency hires experts from KPMG. That is quite a tight-knit family. The government has awarded KPMG \$92 million in contracts since 2006. The Canada Revenue Agency cut a deal with KPMG and agreed not to prosecute its wealthy clients who were hiding their cash on the Isle of Man.

Would the minister really have us believe that the government has declared war on tax evasion, when that very same government has a rather incestuous relationship with what Yves Boisvert of *La Presse* calls the “tax dodging machine”?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency has some of the most stringent post-employment rules in the entire Government of Canada.

When CRA employees leave their job, they must meet very strict conditions. Disclosing information is prohibited by law, indefinitely.

I would remind everyone that any employee or former employee of CRA who breaks those rules faces penalties and even criminal prosecution.

[English]

The Speaker: Now I believe that the official opposition House leader has the usual Thursday question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the government House leader if she could share with this House what the business of the House will be for the remainder of this week. When we return, we will be hearing about the budget, and hopefully there will be some very good news for Canadians in terms of some tax relief. Will she share what will be happening in the week we come back?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue with the debate on the Conservative opposition motion.

After today, we will have one remaining opposition day in this supply cycle. That debate will take place on Tuesday, March 21.

Tomorrow we will continue with the report stage debate on Bill C-22 concerning the national security intelligence committee of parliamentarians. That debate will continue on Monday after colleagues return from the constituency week.

I should also mention that a take-note debate on Operation Unifier will take place on Monday evening.

Wednesday we will commence consideration at second reading of Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, until 4 p.m., at which time the Minister of Finance will make his budget presentation.

Thursday shall be the first of four days of budget debate, also referred to as leaders' day.

* * *

• (1510)

JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH SEXUAL ASSAULT LAW TRAINING ACT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations—

Excuse me, could I get some order?

The Speaker: Members will assist me by saying “shh”, and I ask those who want to carry on conversations to do so out in the lobby.

The hon. opposition House leader.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations, and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding the order made March 8, 2017, Bill C-337, an act to amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code (sexual assault) be withdrawn from the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and referred to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The Speaker: Does the hon. official opposition House leader have unanimous consent of the House to pose 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)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN FORCES TAX BENEFIT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan had three minutes left in his questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not want to disappoint the member across the way. I have a question for the member.

Business of Supply

Back in 2014, our troops were deployed to Kuwait. There was a decision made a number of months later that there should be additional compensation given to those troops. It was not until after the federal election of 2015 that this government actually ensured not only that they would be given that additional compensation but that it would be retroactive.

There was a process that ultimately saw Mr. Harper not provide the money up front. Would the member not agree that the process needs to be revisited, and that is why it is very encouraging when we have the Minister of National Defence, not only today but even in days prior, making the commitment to readjust that process?

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was doing my best to encourage some of the quieter members of the government to ask a question, but I certainly welcome questions from my friend from Winnipeg North, although I do not always agree with them.

The reality is that the previous government was actually very clear on the importance of providing danger pay to troops who are in conflict situations or who are in danger, in general, and committed in different theatres throughout the world.

What we are talking about specifically in this motion is the fact that there were members of the Canadian Forces stationed at Camp Arifjan who had their specific benefit cancelled on September 1, 2016. That is something the member cannot blame on the previous government. September 1, 2016 was almost a full year after the last federal election.

We in the opposition are saying that action needs to be taken to reverse that action by the current government to address the injustice of withdrawing danger pay from our men and women in uniform who are in a very dangerous situation.

What we need to hear from the government is a commitment to address this, not only going forward but also retroactively. This motion needs to pass. It is a non-binding motion, so it is essential that the government commit, as well, to actually acting and implementing the fullness of this motion, which includes the retroactive component.

● (1515)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the tragic passing of Master Corporal Alfred Barr of the 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron yesterday. I extend my sincere condolences to his family on behalf of all Canadians.

I am here to participate in the debate proposed by the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, with whom I have the pleasure of working on the Standing Committee on National Defence.

[English]

I would like to thank him for the support he has shown me and my family.

[Translation]

We talked earlier today about the tax breaks offered to all members of the armed forces on missions abroad.

[English]

I am glad that we are coming together today to support our Canadian Armed Forces. In fact, a number of members on both sides of the House have served in the Canadian Armed Forces, and many more have family members who have served or are serving.

[Translation]

I would like to talk more specifically about the pay and benefits we offer our men and women in uniform.

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces make a unique contribution to Canadian society. They defend our country, protect our interests, and do an excellent job of representing Canada on missions around the world.

[English]

The government recognizes the hardships military life places on those in uniform and on the families that support them. They say that when members serve, their families serve along with them. I could not agree more. We want to give them the compensation and benefits that reflect the demands placed on them by their service.

The military is staffed with talented, passionate, and driven people. Those who put on a uniform do it because they want to serve their country. It is not a job; it is a calling.

[Translation]

The amount of money soldiers receive is commensurate with their skills, education, and training, not to mention the fact that they put their lives at risk. Technicians and experts need special training to do their work. In the civilian world, such specialized training would result in a higher salary. The same is true in the military. Men in women in uniform must also be compensated for the additional costs imposed on them by military service.

Every member of a military family will say that moving to a new home every few years is part of their life. Moving is a difficult and expensive process for everyone. Frequent moves are a particular burden that members of the armed forces have to deal with. They are hard on soldiers and their families. We want to help them to be able to better manage these difficulties. The government tries to offset the financial burden that comes with moving from one city to another, such as the loss of capital from selling a house, the real costs of moving and any associated costs, such as travel and meals.

Through the Canadian Forces integrated relocation program, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen in Canada receive more benefits to help cover the cost of their relocation. The relocation also takes into account the variations in the cost of living in the country. A dollar in Vancouver does not get you as far as a dollar in Gagetown does.

The location of the assignment should not affect the soldiers' quality of life. That is why we provide Canadian Armed Forces members a cost-of-living adjustment to ensure that they can make the most of their hard-earned pay.

• (1520)

[English]

The last thing Canadians want is to have those who serve proudly in our military pay extra because of their sacrifice. Canadians care about the Canadian Armed Forces. We do too. That is why we provide them with world-class compensation and benefits when they are in service, but we do not stop taking care of them when they leave.

[Translation]

For many veterans, serving in the forces was their one and only career. Leaving the Canadian Armed Forces and making the move to civilian life can be difficult. The government and its partners offer several transition programs to help members be successful in civilian life. We want them to find new careers that make the most of their work ethic and dedication. The second career assistance network program is the main program offered by the Department of National Defence to help our men and women in uniform prepare to find a civilian job.

The program helps them prepare for job searching, determine the professional path that is best for them, and map out their long-term professional goals.

The government's relationship with private partners opens even more doors. Private programs such as the transition assistance website links soldiers with partners in the business community who want to help.

The helmets to hardhats program helps veterans find work in the construction industry with the help of labour unions. Operation entrepreneur provides training, funding, and mentorship to soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen leaving the armed forces and helps them start a small business.

[English]

Transitioning to civilian life is challenging enough. It is even harder when a member is ill or injured. We want members to have fulfilling lives and careers after their service, where their injuries do not hold them back.

Taking off the uniform is not always an easy decision for Canadian Armed Forces members or their families, so the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of National Defence are working together to close the seam to ensure a smooth transition for members and their families.

In addition, the vocational rehabilitation program prepares Canadian Armed Forces personnel who are long-term disabled for meaningful employment in the private sector. The Canadian Armed Forces also works closely with its partners in VAC and other organizations to identify meaningful and substantive employment for veterans, both in the private sector and in the public service. We know that Canadian Armed Forces members have a wide range of skills and expertise, in many areas, that benefit employers across the board.

We want to encourage more businesses and organizations to hire veterans, especially those who may be ill and injured. VAC has created a veterans hiring unit. The whole of government must

Business of Supply

continue to be committed to positively advancing the mandate of the Veterans Hiring Act. I encourage all members of this House to consider hiring a veteran.

[Translation]

These days, most Canadians, both military personnel and civilians, are afraid of not being able to pay their bills when they retire.

For longstanding members, the Canadian Armed Forces pension plans help to provide financial security in retirement. Military service pensions remain among the best in Canada. Retired members of the regular force, the reserve, and their survivors can count on their pensions to enjoy a comfortable retirement.

[English]

One of the most selfless decisions a citizen can make is to put on a uniform and serve his or her country. It takes bravery, commitment, and sacrifice to be a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. Canadians ask so much of our men and women in uniform. We must offer them compensation and benefits that reflect how much we value their service.

[Translation]

That is why we take care of our serving Canadian soldiers, sailors, and airmen. That is why we prepare them for rewarding careers at the end of their service, and that is why we provide retired members with a first-class pension.

Canadians love the Canadian Armed Forces and so do we.

[English]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I commend the member for the excellent work she has done on veterans affairs, and I congratulate her on becoming the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

You talked a bit about family. I understand, and maybe—

• (1525)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member to address comments to the Chair and not to the individual.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, you may not be aware, but this member is about to become a member of the military family. I wonder if she could comment on what she might perceive some of the effects would be on families when decisions like this become all of a sudden thrown in their laps.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I have had the great pleasure of working with the member opposite when I was on the veterans affairs committee. He himself is a family member of the Canadian Armed Forces. His father served valiantly in our Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to thank him and his father for their service.

I am a family member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I have two sons currently serving, very proudly, so I am a proud military mom.

Business of Supply

I can assure members that this government takes the physical, mental, and financial well-being of our Canadian Armed Forces members and our veterans very seriously. We will continue to do so. I am happy that we are having this conversation today to show that all sides of this House can come together in support of our Canadian Armed Forces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I did not hear a lot of information on the heart of the Conservatives' motion, the tax benefit of between \$1,500 and \$1,800 per month to our military based on the adversity and risks of the missions on which they are deployed.

Could my colleague talk specifically about the tax benefit of between \$1,500 and \$1,800 per month that her government may be withdrawing? I would like to know more about her position on this.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As the minister said earlier, we support this motion. We are currently ensuring soldiers sent to Camp Arifjan get retroactive payment.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it bears mentioning that the minister stood in the House today and dealt with this motion. He indicated to the House that the 15 people affected in Camp Arifjan will have their pay retroactively restored. Would the hon. member be prepared to comment on the swiftness with which the minister reacted, given this egregious situation and given that it had been outstanding for 10 years previously?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, the minister, upon being made aware of this, asked the chief of the defence staff to look into it to not only correct the issue but to look into the process that has been put in place to make sure that we are not only following specific guidelines but are making sure that decisions being made are in support of our Canadian Armed Forces. I am happy that we are not only rectifying this but are looking into making sure that the process is as complete and as robust as possible.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion, but regrettably, this motion has been rendered moot by virtue of the minister's commitment to retroactively deal with the military personnel who were affected by the pay change on September 1, 2016.

This has had a 10-year history. The government was asked no less than 15 times in the past number of years to address these situations where personnel arrive on the field with a certain understanding of their pay and compensation package, and then while there, it is changed. The minister has done the right thing and addressed it. Therefore, in some respects, the motion is moot.

The government will be supporting the motion, and I am assuming the Conservative Party will support the motion. I do not know the position of the NDP, but I expect it will support the motion. In some

respects, we are debating something that everyone agrees to. Whatever else I might say at this point, and possibly what has been said prior to this point, would be something less than useful to the actual motion that is on the floor of the House.

In the spirit of contributing things that are tangentially relevant, with the indulgence of the chair, I will go to a discussion about the value of our people who put on the uniform. No matter what they do, whether they are in Halifax or Wainwright or Kuwait, when they put on the uniform, they are taking a proud place in Canadian history.

As we approach our 150th birthday this year, it is worth remembering that in many ways the story of Canada's military is Canada's history. In August 2014, we marked 100 years since the First World War began. The world had never seen such a conflict. More than 650,000 men and women from Canada and Newfoundland served, which is no small feat for countries with a combined population of eight million. Let us project forward and ask what would that be if we had a population such as we have now, somewhere in the order of four or five times bigger? We would have three million men and women in uniform in this kind of a conflict. It is unimaginable given the year in which we live, 2017.

Sixty-six thousand people gave their lives, and more than 172,000 were wounded. Many spent years away from home fighting from trench to trench across bloody battlefields in Europe which was pockmarked with shell holes. I hope as people come to Ottawa to celebrate our 150th anniversary they take advantage of that opportunity to go to the Canadian War Museum just down the street from here, and spend a day going through Canada's military history. It is a fascinating and honourable history.

This year a Canadian Armed Forces contingent will return to one of the most important and well-known battlefields in Canadian history, Vimy Ridge. At Vimy, regiments from coast to coast saw action together in a distinctly Canadian triumph, helping create a new and stronger sense of our nation's identity. The success of our soldiers at Vimy is seen as one of the defining moments of our history, the moment when Canada came of age. Today on land granted to Canada by a grateful France, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial rises above the now quiet surrounding countryside.

● (1530)

At this point, if I may, I will tell a story about a Scarborough soldier. His name was Lieutenant Leslie H. Miller. He was a farmer, like many other people who enlisted in the Canadian military. He went to Vimy. He participated in that fight and he survived. When he climbed to the top of Vimy Ridge, the only thing left of an oak tree was the acorns that had fallen to the ground in the course of the battle. He gathered up those acorns and had them transported back to his farm in Scarborough.

If people go to the farm, which is located in the northwest section of Scarborough, they will see a huge stand of oak trees. These oak trees have been there for literally 100 years. People from Vimy Oaks are keen to have saplings from those trees planted on French soil at the foot of the Vimy Ridge memorial. It is really quite an interesting and exciting concept where 100 of those trees are planted along what will be an interpretive path from one of the villages in France right to the Vimy Ridge memorial. That work is actually being undertaken as we speak.

Business of Supply

It is an interesting and challenging problem, because there is so much unexploded ordnance in the fields surrounding the Vimy Ridge memorial. That work is taking place. I want to commend the initiatives of Monty McDonald and a variety of other people who have taken it upon themselves to initiate this Vimy Ridge memorial and express it in a uniquely Canadian way by bringing the saplings that had been grown on Canadian soil and replanting them on French soil. In a uniquely Canadian way this expresses our commitment to the people of France, to the people of Europe, and our own nation-building exercise.

Vimy was not the only battle that shaped our nation. Just over two decades later, a new generation of service men and women returned to the battlefields of Europe and further afield to fight in the Second World War. They landed on the shores of Dieppe to face great adversity. More than half of their number were killed or taken prisoner.

They landed in Sicily and launched an assault, slowly retaking Italy back from the Germans. They landed at Juno Beach, fielding the third largest allied D-Day force. From there, they pushed through Normandy, to Belgium, and on to liberate the Netherlands. Those who have been to the Netherlands on the various memorial days know that still the Dutch greet Canadians with a special pride and enthusiasm and a special affection.

Meanwhile, in the icy waters of the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea, men braved the German U-boats to keep the vital flow of men and supplies open between North America and Europe and into Russia.

Not far from this very House there is a street named after one such man, Jerome Jodoin, who joined the navy with nine of his buddies in 1941. Before his 20th birthday he had sailed the Murmansk run four times over. When the City of Ottawa named a street after him, a fellow veteran and Legion comrade, Gus Este, was there at the ceremony. Mr. Este was one of more than 26,000 Canadians who answered the call of a recently formed United Nations to help maintain the international peace and security in Korea. He also served in Germany, Cyprus, Egypt, and as a member of the Canadian Postal Corps, ensuring deployed personnel could keep in touch with their families back home.

The Canadian military has a proud history, one that we all should take some pride in, particularly on this anniversary of our nation at 150 years and of Vimy Ridge at 100 years. We are a nation that does answer the call. We continue to answer the call. We have some of the absolutely finest soldiers. We hope that in passing this motion, we will honour their deployment by appropriate compensation.

● (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is a former parliamentary secretary to the minister of national defence, and he has always been a consistent advocate for our men and women in the forces. I wonder if he would like to expand on why it is so important that government support our men and women in the forces. We often talk about that social contract. I wonder if he could underline the importance of why our forces are there for our sovereignty, for ensuring that Canadian values are that much more appreciated around the world.

● (1540)

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, the Canadian military has three great tasks: to provide defence of Canada, to provide defence of North America, and from time to time provide expeditionary forces. In that way we protect our own sovereignty. It is a foolish nation that outsources its own sovereignty; hence the importance of our Canadian military to retain and maintain and expand our sovereignty so that other nations that might wish to take advantage of Canada will not be able to do so.

The key importance of our military is that we project our own sovereignty and we protect our own sovereignty and we do not outsource our sovereignty to other nations.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, on the point about how important it is for a nation to protect its sovereignty, the previous Martin government refused to participate in the ballistic defence program. I just want to hear the member's thoughts on whether or not Canada should seek to work with the United States, because if there are issues having to do with missile defence, right now it is the Americans who hold all the cards when it comes to that. I would love to hear the member's thoughts.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, the minister launched a defence review last year, and I am not going to pre-empt what that defence review might say on this particular subject or any other subject for that matter.

The issue of not outsourcing our own sovereignty, of protecting our own sovereignty is top of mind and it has to be for any government. It does not matter whether it is a blue government or a red government.

I am rather hoping that our excellent relationship with our NORAD partners will enable us to contribute in ways that are useful for both nations.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this topic is of particular interest to me because I did have the opportunity to work as a financial educator at the Garrison Saint-Jean in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. I witnessed first-hand the financial concerns of the members of the Canadian Forces at that time, which was at the time of the deployment to Afghanistan. That is why it is of a particular concern to me when the motion seems to imply that this is a very recent phenomenon. In listening to the very interesting speech by my colleague, the previous government was asked 15 times to change this. I would like the member to comment.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, it was 15 times in 2013 alone. The response was by then prime minister Stephen Harper, then parliamentary secretary Chris Alexander, and then defence minister Peter MacKay, all of whom punted the problem on to somewhere else and it has been punted on to us. The minister today said enough with the punting and we will fix it. When he says that is going to happen, that is going to happen.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is great to be up speaking today. Before I get started, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

Business of Supply

I want to express my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Master Corporal Alfred Barr, who died yesterday in a training accident near Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his loved ones at this very difficult time.

The other thing I want to say is that just recently, within the last couple of years, my youngest son has had the chance to join the reserves. Now that I have a family member involved, this subject is more personal. My son joined the Lincoln and Welland Regiment in St. Catharines and had the chance this past summer to do his basic training in Meaford, Ontario. I am certainly proud of Andrew, who is over in Germany right now. I am proud of all my children, but I thought I would mention that.

Turning to the discussion on the motion today, what the Liberals seem to have done is commit a major wrong against our men and women in uniform who are serving and fighting against ISIS in some of the most hostile and dangerous territory in the world. ISIS is an enemy whose members have beheaded people on camera, and just to prove a point, they have sexually enslaved young Yazidi girls just because they are Yazidi or non-Muslim. They brought hellish conditions to hundreds of thousands of innocent people just because they do not believe and worship in the same way. ISIS is a clear enemy that stands against everything that Canada and the civilized world represent.

ISIS must be eradicated through concerted, consistent, and strong effort, no matter how long it takes. This is why when we were in government we committed to doing exactly that. It is why the current Prime Minister is continuing with a similar mission.

ISIS has bought back medieval views, way of life, and treatment of minorities and women in a way the world has not seen in recent times. Its members have conquered territory in Iraq and Syria, and they have enslaved, forcibly converted, sexually enslaved, or killed their victims along the way. Canada and the world have faced many evils in the past, and ISIS is one of those evils that we have with us today. It is why our fight against ISIS is absolutely necessary and critical to win. Canada cannot stand on the sidelines when the rest of the world is committed to fight and eradicate these genocidal fanatics.

Our brave men and women in uniform have contributed and delivered significant results in this fight. For over two years, our Armed Forces have done their part and made tremendous sacrifices that very few of us in this place have made. What is the reward for the incredible service and sacrifice for our country? The reward the Liberals have decided to give our men and women in uniform fighting ISIS is to take away their tax benefits. Some 15 soldiers in Kuwait were told that they were going to lose a tax benefit, which provided \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for them and their families, saving more than \$9,000 each over the course of a six-month tour.

If that was not enough, the Liberals went ahead and cancelled the benefit for all Canadian troops in Kuwait as of June 1 of this year. This was done, according to the Liberals, because it is not dangerous enough for our troops to receive this benefit while they are stationed in Kuwait and fighting ISIS in Iraq. I have to repeat this for everyone to really hear it, because it is so stunning. The Liberals ended a \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month tax benefit, essentially danger pay, for all Canadian troops serving in Kuwait and fighting ISIS.

Removing danger pay does not seem wise when the Minister of National Defence's own parliamentary secretary admitted that "...it is true that our soldiers will be at greater risk". This refers to the Liberal's decision of February 2016 to put more troops on the ground in the fight against ISIS. More troops on the ground means greater risk. This was acknowledged by the Minister of National Defence who said, "Our people will be in close proximity to the dangers inherent in the region". Now we are seeing the defence minister take away danger pay for our soldiers serving and fighting in that very area.

One of our Armed Forces members serving in Kuwait said that he believes that the Canadians are the only ones who will not be getting this tax break. When I first read this I thought that I had not read the report correctly. However, to my shock, I found out that it was indeed true. I could not understand why the Liberals would do this. To serve as a comparison, the United States provides tax exemption status to its fighters that are fighting ISIS. It is no surprise that one of our soldiers said that it felt like "we got kicked in the stomach".

Do the Liberal government, the Liberal defence minister, and the Liberal members of Parliament want our troops in Kuwait to feel like they got kicked in the stomach by their own government who sent them into harm's way to fight a murderous, genocidal enemy? Right now, that is exactly the way it feels.

● (1545)

We can also listen to Glenda Lindsay, the mother of one of our affected soldiers, who said that she feels as though her son is being cheated. She said, "They're cutting corners at the troops' expense". Ms. Lindsay has also started an online petition to help rectify this major error on the part of the Liberals. Petition e-882 calls upon the Government of Canada to immediately reinstate and retroactively pay back the tax relief measures for all troops deployed in Operation Impact. I encourage all Canadians watching and listening today to go online and sign their name in support.

Let us face it. As we are sitting here discussing and debating, those soldiers are fighting for our very right to do so. They are defending our right to have this debate in an open, tolerant, accepting society. Our troops will be fighting an enemy that hates these very values and is willing to die to destroy that throughout the world. What do our soldiers get for fighting this enemy? A well-earned and much-deserved tax benefit of \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month was taken away, just like that. This makes no sense. There is simply no logic to explain why the Liberals are doing this.

Business of Supply

Our men and women in uniform volunteer to serve their country against all sorts of threats, in all sorts of dangerous environments, and it is difficult to think of a more dangerous mission than the one now being fought against ISIS. Members of our Armed Forces leave their wives, husbands, boyfriends, or girlfriends to travel abroad to perform extremely dangerous work and put themselves at risk in service to our country. They often miss their children's birthdays, their own wedding anniversaries, and their kids' graduations. Family members of those deployed to Camp Arifjan reached out to MPs to express concern and in search of explanations. They said this treatment of our service men and women is embarrassing. Why would the Liberals even consider taking a tax break away from any of our troops, especially those fighting ISIS?

What also shocked me is that the Liberals have known for months that the Canadian Armed Forces members deployed against ISIS have not been adequately compensated for the hardship and risks associated with their deployment. To be clear, the decision to take away this tax credit was made after the troops had agreed to deploy. What this means is that the Liberals have cheated our troops and their families out of hard-earned money, money that our troops and their families expect, count on; and to be very clear, it is money our troops and their families deserve.

If all of this money is being borrowed on the backs of our future generations, why are the Liberals penny-pinching when it comes to our men and women in uniform? Just yesterday the Liberals decided to spend another \$650 million in other countries, but they away tax benefits from our soldiers fighting ISIS. I am not sure I can quite understand the logic of that. Do our soldiers need to transfer and serve in the armed forces of other countries to be properly compensated? I do not think that would be the case.

When I first read the reports of our troops losing this tax benefit, I thought it was definitely bad news and something I could not support. To make matters worse, when we brought it up in the House, the Liberals decided that the best solution to this issue was not to restore the benefits but to revoke them for all our troops fighting ISIS. I thought to myself, what about my son Andrew? As I mentioned earlier, he joined the reserves and has been training. What if he had been in Kuwait and he had lost his danger pay because the government did not think it was dangerous enough to fight ISIS? How would all of us in this place think if it were our sons or daughters who were serving? What would we want our government to do if we were in the same position?

When we were in government, a similar issue came up in relation to our troops in Afghanistan. What we did as a government was very different from what the Liberals are doing. We cut through the bureaucratic red tape, and made sure our troops got the support they deserved. We did the right thing for our men and women, and although we are no longer in power, we will continue to do right by our men and women in uniform. We ask the other side of the House to join us.

We have been listening to the families of those affected. We have raised the issue on multiple occasions. The Prime Minister and his Liberal MPs have no excuse. At this time, the Prime Minister has plans to deploy more troops to dangerous missions in Africa. It is very clear that he is interested in winning a seat on the United

Nations Security Council. The Prime Minister and his Liberal MPs should not be penny-pinching when it comes to our troops.

Let me end with family members of deployed soldiers at Camp Arifjan, who said in correspondence with their MPs that this is a country worth working for, worth continuing to strengthen and build and worth sacrifice; to have someone pass a policy that impacts their family in such an essential manner without taking into consideration the implications on the families who readily sacrifice is shocking and disconcerting.

We call upon the government to finally do its job, reverse this terrible decision to take away this tax benefit, and start supporting our brave men and women who stand on guard for all of us.

• (1550)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member and I sit on the foreign affairs committee, which I would like to think is one of the more civilized committees on the Hill. We accomplish great things and, miracle of miracles, actually arrive at consensus opinions.

In the spirit of consensus opinions and civilized debate, would he agree with me, given the minister's speech this morning, in which he undertook to retroactively fix the issue as of September 1, 2016, for the 15 people involved, that this debate is largely moot, that the motion will be supported by the government, by his party that moved the motion, and as I understand it, the NDP as well? Would he agree with me that in some respects, the motion is moot?

• (1555)

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, yes, I think there is a lot of consensus in the foreign affairs committee. It is a committee that does great work. I am hopeful, in this age of consensus and the fact that we are working together, that this is a moot point. If everyone supports it and the money is reinstated, our troops will be paid danger pay, and I am looking forward to the government fulfilling that commitment.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, I commend the member's son on what he has decided to do, and I thank him for his service.

The chief of the defence staff indicated that troops are supposed to receive a six-month warning if their tax status is lost. I am wondering if the hon. member could comment on that and, though this does not seem to be the case, if perhaps that could be adding to some of the frustration.

Business of Supply

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, I would not say that governments and bureaucracies always communicate the way they should or could. Communication is something on which individuals can always do a better job. It always important that we have clarity. My colleague mentioned that the defence minister is going to support this and vote for it, and I certainly hope that sends a clear message to our men and women in uniform that they do not need to worry about us in the House or the government supporting what they do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I would like him to tell us about the issue that was raised a couple of times concerning the fact that the Conservative government was well aware of the situation that allowed Canadian Forces pay to be reduced when they were deployed overseas. This has been requested quite a few times.

What does he know about the previous government's response? Why is it up to the current Liberal government to solve this problem?

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, there is one thing Conservatives on this side of the House find amusing, and that is that we have not been in government now for a year and a half—it will be two years this October—and it is always somewhat entertaining when we are blamed for things that are happening at the present time. Another one the government likes to refer to is the softwood lumber agreement that expired when we were in government, which was at the end of our mandate and just before the election.

My concern is not so much what happened then, but what happens now. What is the action the government intends to take, whether it is issues like this one or softwood lumber? Sure, the softwood lumber agreement may have expired as Conservatives were nearing the close of our time in government, but it has been a year and a half and I am now concerned about moving forward and making sure things are being done now.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Master Corporal Barr, and everyone involved, as well as the unit, on the loss of his life yesterday.

I am pleased to rise today in the House and add my voice to the debate concerning the Liberals' move to end the tax benefit that was being provided to soldiers fighting against ISIS. This is an important conversation that needs to be had. I want to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for his tireless work on this issue and all the issues that are facing our Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

On September 1, 2016, the Liberals chose to end the tax relief measures provided to 15 Canadian troops stationed in Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. They did so without giving any warning that this would be happening, and yet at the same time, approximately 300 other Canadian soldiers who were also in Kuwait under Operation Impact did not have their benefits touched. The change only occurred after the troops were already deployed, and without any notice.

Immediately, the families of these soldiers began reacting, reaching out to their members of Parliament to express their frustration and dismay that this promised benefit was taken away without any justification for doing so. These families were counting on this benefit to help support them while their spouses were far away from home, serving their country.

In my youth, which was just a few years ago, I was one of these family members, which is why this issue resonates deeply with me, but I will touch more on that later.

Once this matter was raised by Conservative members of Parliament, we took action. We listened to the concerns of the troops' families and committed to standing up for them and to representing them in a way the Liberals refused to do.

In November 2016, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman sent a letter to the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Finance asking that they look into the issue and ensure that all troops deployed on Operation Impact received equitable benefits.

A few days after this, he raised the issue directly with the CDS at his appearance at the Standing Committee on National Defence. The following month, he raised the issue again with the Minister of Defence at the same committee. The minister responded along the following lines:

For the specific ones that you're talking about, there is some work that the military has to do with Treasury Board as well, but we are working through the complexities based on how this is done to make sure there is more equity for our troops when it comes to deployments.

Finally, in January 2017, the departmental hardship and risk committee announced to the troops that in its December 2016 quarterly meeting it was determined that all tax relief measures to CAF members deployed to Kuwait under Operation Impact would be cancelled and that this change would take effect on June 1, 2017, to allow members and their families to adjust to the decision.

This is absolutely unconscionable. These brave men and women were being given this tax relief because they are putting their lives on the line to serve their country every day. Instead of doing the right thing, which would have been to reinstate the tax benefit after the initial 15 troops lost it back in September 2016, the Liberals have decided to end it all together.

When Canadian troops are deployed, there is an inherent risk associated with that. These risks can mostly be broken up into two parts. The first part deals with what we, and most Canadians, traditionally see as the dangers of being in a combat zone, such as the risk of coming under enemy attack. This is not just a concern for the front line. It affects all troops who are deployed, as they could potentially become soft targets for attacks, including mortars and suicide bombers.

Business of Supply

As an example, when our Canadian Forces were deployed to Afghanistan, the high-risk area was deemed to be Kandahar, while Kabul was considered less dangerous. In Kabul, our troops would regularly leave their compound in order to go to the military hospital in Kabul. They would work there during the day and return to their compound at night. My brother, when he was performing these duties, fortunately had no incidents while he and our troops were there. However, as many members likely know, there was an attack on that very same hospital just two days ago, where an ISIS bomber and others dressed up as doctors in white clinic jackets entered and shot and killed 38 people and rising, and wounding many more.

That is just one type of risk that our men and women in uniform have to consider when they are volunteering to deploy. Other risks include environmental risks and diseases. Kuwait is a hot climate and there are diseases that exist there that we are fortunate not to have to worry about here in Canada, such as malaria.

• (1600)

The drugs used to protect our troops against malaria can have major side effects, as well. Our soldiers need to be protected, but they also need to feel as though their country understands and appreciates the risks that they are taking to serve. By taking away measures that provide tax relief for them and their families, we are doing the exact opposite of recognizing the sacrifices they have made.

I would like to acknowledge that while these troops are deployed, their quality of life changes dramatically. My father was a major general in the Canadian Army, and there were years when my entire family spent time following him around the world to his various postings. I recall that when we lived in Pakistan, the temperature was often so hot that it felt like going out into a blast furnace every time we stepped out of the air-conditioned building.

Our soldiers are expected to be able to work long hours in these conditions, often carrying equipment and gear such 40-pound rucksacks, sometimes seven days a week, for weeks on end, with limited time off. They deserve to be compensated for this, and I cannot understand how the Liberals do not recognize that.

One important aspect that needs to be considered in all of this is the effect that the removal of this tax benefit will have on the families of our troops. When my father was deployed to Cyprus in 1966, my family faced a number of challenges while he was gone. My mother had to step into the role of both parents, and as a child I keenly felt my father's absence. He was not around to help me with my schooling, to watch me play the sports I was so passionate about, or to teach me those day-to-day life lessons that are only available when someone is there, physically, in front of us.

After my father and mother passed away, I came across some of the letters that he wrote to her during his deployments. In them, he expressed his concerns about being away, and he expressed how he was trying his best to figure out how he could help with raising their four children while he was not around. He would indicate the friends and colleagues my mother could contact for help where possible.

One of the issues he brought up was finances. It is something that every household has to deal with, but it becomes infinitely more difficult when one parent is away and often unreachable. I strongly

feel that anything that can be done to help our soldiers and their families ease the burden of deployment should absolutely be done. It is shocking that the Liberals do not seem to feel the same way.

One of the roles that I am honoured to hold in Ottawa is that of vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We regularly hear from veterans of the Canadian Forces who have been deployed to high-risk areas such as Kuwait. One of the recurring things that we have been told is that when it comes to dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs, there is a huge level of distrust. Countless veterans have expressed their frustrations surrounding promises that have been made and broken by the federal government, time and time again. They are tired of hearing platitudes being dispensed by ministers when there is little or nothing to show for it at the end of the day.

Some veterans who struggle with PTSD are even triggered by receiving an envelope in the mail from the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is called "brown envelope syndrome" and it is real.

• (1605)

When the government makes decisions unilaterally and without warning, such as ending this tax benefit, it shows our Canadian Forces members that there is reason to distrust those who are meant to be helping them.

The ending of this tax relief measure for our troops could have been easily resolved back in September 2016. The Liberals could have recognized the error and reversed the decision that took away the benefit for the 15 troops in Kuwait, troops who were already deployed when this decision was made. Instead, they chose to end the tax relief measure for all troops stationed in Kuwait.

The risk in Kuwait is still real. On Canada's travel website, travellers are warned "you should exercise a high degree of caution due to the threat of terrorism." I cannot comprehend how the government can say this, and still deny that our soldiers are at risk due to these same factors.

In making the decision to cut this benefit after the troops were already deployed, the Liberals have cheated our soldiers and their families out of hard-earned money that they expected, counted on, and deserve.

In conclusion, this motion calls upon the government to show support and appreciation for our brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. While I am hearing positive signs, I will call on the Liberal government to step up to the plate and do the right thing. Reverse this ill-thought-out decision, retroactively reinstate the tax benefit, and show our Canadian Armed Forces that their government truly does recognize the sacrifices that they have made to serve their country.

Business of Supply

•(1610)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this issue is largely moot. We agree, and likely when the motion comes before the House when we return, it will be a unanimous vote, I want to focus on the hon. member's personal experience of being, for want of better term, an army brat. He obviously had some personal experience with it. While the designation on the degree of risk is not on the floor of the House, generally, the military divides it into four categories of risk, one, two, three, and four, the lowest being one and the highest being three and four. Clearly, not all deployments are equal. I am sure the hon. member has experienced that not all deployments are equal, in terms of their risk.

Notwithstanding the fact that the discussion about risk level is not on the floor, I would be interested in the hon. member's views as to whether the current categorization of risk, which then triggers the degree of compensation, is appropriate and is adequate.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, that is true I was an army brat. I did not spend a lot of my time on the bases, as many soldiers' families do, but I was fortunate enough to see a lot of the world and I have benefited immensely from that travel experience with my father.

He is correct in the sense that the levels of risk are gauged at various levels. Level two is exactly where we start to see that avenue as to where the risk becomes higher in certain areas. Those risks are often based on where they are deployed, the conditions they are in, and whether it may be in a subtropical part of the world as we do experience issues that I have talked about, mosquito-borne malaria virus. We look at issues such as whether we might be sending our troops to Africa and the concerns if we end up sending our soldiers to Mali.

Definitely, each one of those risks needs to be looked at individually and independently and they need to be assessed on those various merits.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my colleague can comment further on the retroactive component of the motion and, also, recognize that this is a non-binding motion. I am very glad to hear members of the government say they will support it, but that does not necessarily mean that they will be implementing it. It is important for us to emphasize all aspects of the motion and follow up with the government to make sure that this actually gets done, given the withdrawal of that payment in September of last year, well after the government had taken office.

I wonder if the member could comment on the importance of the retroactive component, restoring the payment that was lost in the past, and also the need to follow up to make sure this actually gets done.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, that is a very important part about the motion: the very issue of making sure that the motion, and hopefully we will see throughout the House that we will have unanimous support for the motion, looks at that aspect of retroactivity because the soldiers were told about it after they had committed to deploy and were in theatre. That has a huge effect on the soldiers and their families when all of a sudden they are being

told that now it is being taken away from them. That trust issue is one we need to talk about, because in Veterans Affairs it is a big issue when we deal with issues of how our veterans express themselves with respect to the ongoing effects of their life after they leave the military.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to share my time with my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie, whom I respect. She will have the remaining time I am giving her to tell us about the Conservatives' motion that we are debating today.

The motion fortunately seems to have the unanimous support of the House, based on what I have heard so far. However, we will see if that is the case when it is put to a vote. The motion is fairly specific and aims to restore to members of the Canadian Forces a tax benefit that was taken from them. Deployed members recently learned that their compensation was reduced under the Liberal government. Of course we all agree that the members of the armed forces should be given what they deserve, since they give so much of their time and they are put in harm's way while on missions. As a country, it goes without saying that we give them reasonable compensation in exchange for the missions they carry out.

I will speak of the Canadian Forces with humility. In the House, if there is one issue that makes me humble, it is the Canadian Armed Forces, who do an extraordinary job in our own country and on various missions around the world. In Sherbrooke, I have the opportunity to work with extraordinary members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Indeed, in the riding of Sherbrooke, we are lucky to have four reserve units of the Canadian Armed Forces, stationed in two beautiful armouries. In fact, the Colonel-Gaétan-Côté Armoury on Belvédère Street is beside my constituency office. I encourage everyone who passes by my office to look at the armoury and think of the sacrifices made by the two reserve units there.

As we know, Canada has a long military history. The regiment located in the Colonel-Gaétan-Côté Armoury is the Fusiliers de Sherbrooke, a well-known reserve infantry unit. In fact, it has taken part in many missions, and I want to acknowledge it. I salute Lieutenant-Colonel Philippe Côté, the unit commander. He is a good friend, and I appreciate him very much. I would also like to thank him for the sacrifices he has made for our country as unit commander. The same armoury is home to the 35 Signal Regiment, a reserve unit that also conducts its drills there.

I also want to mention the other two reserve units in Sherbrooke. The 52nd Field Ambulance is housed in the same armoury as the Sherbrooke Hussars, the William Street Armoury. The 52nd Field Ambulance is under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Pierre Simard, a good friend whose work I admire. The fourth reserve unit is the Sherbrooke Hussars, which also has a long history of participating in Canada's missions. I just want to mention Lieutenant-Colonel Louis-Benoît Dutil, commander of the Sherbrooke Hussars.

Business of Supply

These four reserve units do the Canadian Armed Forces proud in the Eastern Townships. I applaud their work and their dedication over the years. As we all know, being a reservist is not the same as serving in the regular forces. Reservists have other careers. Many of them work full-time in Sherbrooke businesses, but they take the time, even on weekends, to train in armouries. They sacrifice their family time to be prepared for deployment.

• (1615)

They have to be ready to leave at a moment's notice in the event that they are called by our country to take part in a mission. They deserve our utmost recognition and, in Sherbrooke, we very much appreciate these four units. By the way, I just want to say that we absolutely must protect the William Street armoury, the second oldest building in Sherbrooke. The Government of Canada owns and maintains it and it is occupied by the two reserve units that I mentioned.

Unfortunately, we recently found out that there has been a plan in place for years to abandon the William Street Armoury and move the four units to the Belvédère Street Armoury. Every socio-economic, cultural, and heritage stakeholder in Sherbrooke opposes the decision, which would spell the demise of the William Street armoury, an historic building in Sherbrooke. By all accounts, no one wants the Minister of National Defence to go down that road.

When it comes to giving our Canadian Armed Forces the training, equipment, and support they need to do their work, it goes without saying that we must properly maintain the armouries where they train and work every day. It goes without saying that the Government of Canada must take the needs of each unit in due consideration. In this case, it is clear that Sherbrooke does not welcome the proposed decision by senior Canadian Forces leadership to merge the four units. As I was just saying, we would end up losing one of Sherbrooke's historic buildings in the heart of its oldest neighbourhood, a unique neighbourhood in Canada.

The building used to be a courthouse, and behind it was an old prison. Next to it was the judge's house. Across the street that leads directly to the armoury, there were lawyers' and notaries' offices. It was a unique legal district in Canada at the time and still is today. It is important to the Sherbrooke community to protect this heritage.

Of course we support this motion, for the reasons I mentioned. We need to fully recognize the sacrifices and efforts made by our Canadian Armed Forces. I think the uncertainty surrounding compensation for our soldiers can be attributed to the uncertainty that surrounds the entire mission the government supports.

There is also some uncertainty regarding the level of risk our soldiers will be exposed to on the ground there, since the government continues to equivocate regarding the nature of the mission and the rules of engagement. While the Liberals seem to be saying that this is a support and training mission, at times it appears to be more than that.

Our current situation is due, among other things, to the uncertainty surrounding the nature of the mission itself and the risk levels our Canadian Armed Forces personnel and our country will be exposed to. Maybe that is why we are having this debate today.

I would also remind the House that this problem is also a result of the Conservatives' inaction. They knew very well that our soldiers' pay could change once they were engaged in the mission. This could have been fixed a long time ago.

In closing, I want to recognize our Canadian Armed Forces for the work they do, which deserves proper recognition. That includes giving them adequate compensation for the missions they are asked to take part in.

• (1620)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, during question period this afternoon, I quoted comments made by a journalist in his column today. These comments could be perceived as being unparliamentary. I acknowledge that I cannot do indirectly what I cannot do directly in this place. I wish to unconditionally withdraw my comments.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. member for Joliette for his comments, which I accept.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my hon. colleague two questions.

First, could he tell the House who removed the tax benefit to our men and women who serve in our forces, which had provided them with extra pay for hardship and risk, and when did that happen?

My second question is more philosophical. Many of us on this side of the House in the New Democratic Party believe we need to equip our armed forces with the most modern, effective, and technologically advanced equipment possible and that we should focus our armed forces on peacekeeping, on defence of Canada, and on aid for natural disasters in Canada.

Does the member have any comments or thoughts on the nature of the military mission that is taking place in Syria and Iraq right now, the one that the Conservatives committed us to and that the Liberals claimed they wanted to end but seemed to have deepened?

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his two excellent questions.

With respect to the question of who removed the tax benefit, it happened under the Liberal government. However, as I was saying earlier, it may be the problem was inherited from the previous government, because it has indeed come up often. It makes it possible for soldiers' compensation to change after they have already been deployed. This is the problem that we are trying to address. In my opinion, not only are we going back and acknowledging the mistake, but we are also trying to identify long-term solutions to address this situation. This is something that should have been done a very long time ago.

Business of Supply

In Canada's peacekeeping and aid missions, I believe that, at least in recent years, Canada has distanced itself somewhat from its traditional image on the international scene. This has definitely had an impact on how Canada is perceived by the rest of the world. I hope that the current government will recognize that we have to restore our image, which is that of a peaceful nation seeking to bring peace to the world.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, members of the NDP talk about equipping our troops, which is important, but they are not really interested in any of the kinds of active commitments that in many cases are needed in the context of the world today. There is not really a peacekeeping mission to be undertaken in the present environment in Syria and Iraq. Even the peace operations contemplated by the government are a good deal away from what we would traditionally conceive of as being peacekeeping given the dangers in those environments.

In listening to the comments the member just made, I wonder if he would like to clarify his party's position specifically, for example, in the context of Syria and Iraq. Do we do nothing, because there is really no role for peacekeeping in that environment? Surely, to get to peace what is required first is the defeat of Daesh.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

Even though we were not in power and not involved in decision-making, we repeatedly outlined our vision during the debate on this mission in Iraq and Syria, our vision of the role that Canada can play to help save lives on the ground now, by addressing the worsening humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria. Canada should instead be a leader in alleviating civilian suffering in this conflict and in expediting the arrival of refugees to Canada, especially with the new U.S. president who is disengaging the United States from some of the necessary commitments surrounding refugee resettlement.

I think we could play a much more constructive role. That is the NDP's vision, one which we raised a number of times when the House considered potential future Canadian deployments.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today and speak about such an important issue. It is extremely important, because for the government it is an enormous responsibility to send our men and women in uniform into harm's way. This is why we must face up to this responsibility, which means a number of things.

For example, this means providing the safest possible framework and proper equipment, and we know the needs in that respect are great. We must continue to work on this and provide proper training. What is not more fundamental but just as important as the technical and material aspects is the need to treat our men and women in uniform with respect. This means recognizing the risk they are put under and giving them adequate compensation.

This is why the very idea of eliminating the tax benefit, which provides between \$1,500 and \$1,800 per day to soldiers fighting ISIS in compensation for the adversity and the risk they face while

on mission, is a disgrace, especially considering the tax breaks offered to big companies and the very rich.

Some people will say that all our soldiers are doing is providing training, advice, and support, but we know that such is not the case. There are risks associated with fighting ISIS. Our soldiers in Iraq in particular are often on the front lines. There have been firefights and even one death. I call that a high-risk mission. I think the Minister of National Defence himself recognized that. That level of risk will have to be taken into account. The government cannot bury its head in the sand. It needs to be open, transparent, and honest about the nature of the mission and properly compensate our men and women in uniform.

I would like to come back to a question that my colleague from Sherbrooke was asked. He gave an excellent speech and he is in close contact with the people and organizations in his riding. He always knows the people he talks about. He actually goes out into the community. He is not just putting on a show.

The member for Sherbrooke was asked about what Canada can do, and I also want to talk about that. There are certain areas in which Canada can play a critical leadership role. That role can be shared in some regards. For example, the Secretary General of the United Nations and others have asked us to stop the flow of weapons and fighters. That is so vital.

Allied forces are retaking Mosul, but the fighters slip away. One of my colleagues made a comparison that I like to use. He said that these terrorist groups are like the Hydra from Greek mythology. When we cut off its head, two heads grow back in its place.

• (1630)

If we want to solve this problem, we need a practical political solution. Stemming the flow of weapons and fighters and fighting radicalization are important, but essentially, we need to find a political solution and take preventive action in fragile regions.

Two other elements that have always been key for the NDP are humanitarian aid and welcoming refugees. Humanitarian aid is still essential. On the ground, it comes in waves. We do not hear much about it these days, but truly awful things are still happening. We must not forget. How can we be so quick to forget the photo of little Aylan, who was found on a beach? That happened just a few months ago.

What about the children in Syria? It is terrible for them because they are under tremendous psychological stress in addition to the stress of everyday living. Assuming a political solution is found eventually, the question is, how will Syria be rebuilt? We need to start thinking about that now. How will Mosul be rebuilt? Are the different communities talking to each other enough? Can we foster that dialogue so the city can be rebuilt as harmoniously and inclusively as possible?

Yes, last week there was an announcement about humanitarian assistance. While I thank the government, there also needs to be development assistance. We need to stop being so short-sighted and think further ahead than the immediate future.

This morning, a woman from Syria who has been living in Turkey for four years spoke before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. She has established centres in Syria where she provides safe spaces for Syrians of all political and religious backgrounds to come together in a safe location. These centres work with women and children because they know very well that their chances of success increase greatly when women are actively involved in conflict resolution and reconstruction.

These centres are building for the future. They are supported in Canada by Development and Peace. We had the chance to speak about it this morning in committee. Unfortunately, many Development and Peace programs, which are critical if we do not want to end up with the same problem in 10, 20, or 30 years, have more to do with development. However, funding is limited; the organization only receives small grants for six months or a year, which does not allow it to train people or put things into place.

I will use this motion as an opportunity to appeal to the government as well: we cannot forget to work on this aspect in the longer term because it will have to be dealt with one of these days.

I see that my time is running out, but I simply wanted to say in closing that I will be voting in favour of this motion, as I believe my colleagues will. I find that in a way it reaffirms the government's moral obligation to our men and women in uniform.

• (1635)

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to much of what was said. I have a great deal of respect for the member opposite in terms of the analysis and history the member has on this issue. Something confused me, and I seek clarification, because a member of her party made the same comment.

My understanding is that this policy existed, and in fact, if we look at the resolution of this issue, it seeks to make it retroactive to 2014. That is obviously a date prior to the Liberal government taking office, which means that this policy is not an expression of Liberal Party policy or this government's policy but rather is a policy we inherited. However, I heard NDP members make reference to the fact that our government changed the policy to take pay away from members of the service. In fact, what we have failed to do, if we have failed to do anything, is change a policy we inherited. It is a policy we have promised to change and to change retroactively back to 2014.

In light of that, would the correct assessment not be that the previous government put this policy in place? The previous government denied pay to Armed Forces members, who are serving this country so well, and it is the previous government's policy that we are now seeking to correct.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Speaker, I would point out that, if memory serves, I was talking about the Government of Canada.

Business of Supply

I think there is no place for partisanship when we are talking about our men and women in uniform. I know that we are always steeped in partisanship here, but I was talking about the Government of Canada.

In this instance I was not pointing fingers, although on some topics I find that the Conservatives and Liberals have rather similar positions. What I see is that this motion seeks to correct an unacceptable situation; I will support it.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, we appreciate the fact that the NDP is supporting the motion and that the government is at least going to vote in favour of the motion, although again, since it is a non-binding motion, we hope the Liberals will actually implement it, including the retroactive component.

It is a little surprising to hear the passing of the buck by the parliamentary secretary. Of course, a time honoured practice of the government members is to try to blame everything, including what has happened since the last election, somehow on the previous government, if they are not blaming the Mulroney government or the Diefenbaker government.

The reality is that we had soldiers lose their danger pay as of September 1, 2016, and that is what the motion speaks to and seeks to address. I wonder if the member could speak to the fact that the government at some point actually needs to take responsibility for the decisions it is making.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Speaker, I have no intention of being caught in the crossfire or being used as a ping-pong ball by my Conservative and Liberal colleagues.

I would be quite willing to delve deeper into the issues I raised, for example. What are we going to do? We are going to deal with it, fine. Now, what are we going to do for the future, not only to prepare for a return to peace in this highly sensitive region, and not just in that region, but what are we going to do to prevent further crises like this?

It may seem like I am veering way off course but, for me, these topics are closely related. What are we going to do in the refugee camps in the Central African Republic, where the recruitment of extremists never stops? What help will we give to these places?

It would appear that everyone agrees on this motion, except when it comes to which side gets the ping-pong ball and who is to blame. I would like us to use our time differently: once we agree this situation needs to be resolved, which I believe we did in the first half hour or the first hour of debate, it would be nice to talk about what we are going to do in the future to resolve this situation and avoid situations like this happening again.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Sherbrooke, Air Transportation; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, The Environment; the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, Public Services and Procurement.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

I am pleased to stand to speak in support of the motion by the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, calling upon the government to reverse its decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit that provided them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardships and risks associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan, whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

It is appalling to me to realize that this decision to strip away this tax benefit was made after the troops had agreed to deploy, adding additional stress to their families back home and causing deep frustration for these soldiers while deployed.

The Minister and many Liberals rising to speak today are doing doublespeak when they claim the troops were deployed without benefits.

On record, the minister tabled a response to an Order Paper question on January 30, in which he stated, “All Canadian Armed Forces personnel serving at all Operation IMPACT Kuwait locations received Tax Relief effective 5 Oct 2014...to 1 Sep 2016”.

In February 2016, the Liberal government made changes to Operation Impact that clearly made the mission more dangerous. It withdrew our six CF-18s, and increased the number of troops on the ground.

The minister stated the following in the House of Commons on February 17, 2016, “Our people will be in close proximity to the dangers inherent in the region. There may be times when they will have to defend themselves, their coalition partners, or the forces they are mentoring.” However, his department decided they did not deserve this risk tax benefit.

Since September, families and the soldiers who have been deployed have been reaching out. Our official opposition critic, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, has responded with a letter calling upon the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Finance to rectify this unfair decision. He raised the issue directly with General Vance and again with the minister himself at the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Ultimately what is the outcome our soldiers are facing, and why did we feel this motion needed to come before the House?

The departmental hardship and risk committee, in its December 2016 quarterly meeting, announced to the troops, not the public, that all tax relief measures to CAF members deployed to Kuwait under Operation Impact would be cancelled as of June 1, 2017, to allow members and their families to adjust to the decision. That sounds like it is full of mercy, but clearly that would not be the case for most families in this circumstance.

This is so in line with the fears and concerns raised with me by veterans in my riding of Yorkton—Melville when they recalled the frightening decade of darkness under the previous Liberal govern-

ment. Knowing the tax-and-spend ideology of the Liberals, they were afraid that if they were to form government, they would again fund their extravagance on the backs of everyday Canadians, and our Canadian Armed Forces specifically.

Here we are, looking at my grandchildren reaching the ages of 33 to 45 before the government will supposedly bring in a balanced budget while also bearing a \$1.5 trillion debt.

The supposed infrastructure stimulus has yet to have any impact on the Canadian economy. The lowering of taxes for the middle class, while raising taxes on the wealthiest 1%, has failed in two ways. It is costing Canadians \$1 billion annually because it is not revenue neutral, as the Liberals had promised in their campaign. The government has removed tax credits and increased taxes on those who can least afford it, effectively penalizing Canadians to lower take-home pay, with no hope of reaching that non-defined Liberal middle-class marker.

Entrepreneurs, our economy builders, along with every household in the country, are being burdened with a carbon tax that increases the costs of absolutely everything, and that will also not be federally neutral.

Significant volumes of Canadian taxpayer dollars are being spent outside of our country by the government to build the Prime Minister's good will with the United Nations. On top of that, as of yesterday's announcement, it is making an ideological shift in the reorientation of Canada's foreign aid strategy, committing \$650 million on sexual and reproductive health rights worldwide

● (1645)

In plain speak, this means the Liberals are intending to legally challenge 125 countries worldwide, mostly in Africa, Latin America, Southern Asia, and the Middle East, where abortion is illegal, where women, their cultures, and the governments do not want it to be part of their maternal health plans. The government will be funding advocacy groups that will work to remove judicial and legal barriers, including the anti-abortion laws in many of these countries.

Perhaps it is time for big brother to come home and to start to focus on the needs of Canadians. If going into a spiralling debt is valid by spending the hard-earned money of Canadians overseas, where is the funding that is needed for 132 drinking water advisories in 89 first nations, and for even more advisories in rural communities in Canada? Where is the funding that returns growth to our small businesses and dependable jobs for our youth, rather than leaving them hanging with no hope but to job churn into the debt-laden never land? Where is the funding for procurement so our armed forces on land, air, and sea can protect our sovereignty and democracy long into the future, rather than reducing their capabilities and losing the deep respect our allies have for our willingness to fulfill our obligations to combat terrorism around the world?

I am glad the motion has the support of all parties in the House. However, as has been said, motions are only carried so far, that it requires more after that. Therefore, I am glad to hear we are all in agreement that this is something we need to do.

Business of Supply

However, our armed forces need to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that when they deploy to train, protect, and fight on our behalf on dangerous combat fields, we have their backs and will not demoralize them or their families by not providing the danger pay and tax benefits they deserve. Canadians want them properly cared for.

Future young men and women, whom we need to enlist, are watching how we care for our armed forces. Our veterans sense of care, compassion, and respect is tied closely to how they see their brothers and sisters treated while they are in the service.

To right this wrong simply requires an order from the minister to respect the request of our armed forces embraced in the motion, right now. It can be done. Reverse the departmental decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit that provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and retroactively provide this payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan, whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

• (1650)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, when one reviews this policy, one sees that it has been in place since 2003. One sees that the previous government made no effort to change it, or re-evaluate it, or modernize it to respond to the volatile and sometimes rapidly changing conditions we find on the ground in different places where Canadian Forces are deployed.

My question for the member opposite is a very simple one. In light of the fact that this is a policy that has simply been executed, not a decision made by the government, and in light of the fact that the government has already committed itself to reviewing this policy in conjunction with the armed forces to ensure our personnel are properly paid and the risk is properly assessed, has the member opposite taken the opportunity to ask a former minister of defence who is in her caucus why the Conservatives did not change it over the last 10 years if it is such a critical issue?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, the truth of the matter is that there are policy changes that need to be taking place all the time throughout government. I understand the government is reviewing this.

In fairness to our soldiers who are on the ground in a very dangerous environment, who were promised this care while they were away on this deployment, I believe we have the responsibility as legislators to say to the bureaucrats that this is not the right time for this. That was certainly done under our previous government when Minister MacKay was in place. In fact, there was a circumstance where apparently the soldiers were overpaid on the error of the department, and the department tried to grab the money back. He said no, that it was not appropriate, that it was wrong, that these people were putting everything on the front lines and putting everything at stake with their families for us. That is why this circumstance needs to be rectified, and it needs to be rectified now.

• (1655)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Madam Speaker, let me just provide a bit more clarity on the issue. Our troops went in back in September 2014. That supplementary financial support was not provided when Mr. Harper sent the troops into Kuwait. In fact, a number of months later there was a review process, to which my colleague just made reference, and under that review, the Conservatives said that yes the troops should receive further compensation.

One would think that the Harper government would have given it then but it did not. It was not until after the election, under the current Minister of National Defence, working with the Minister of Finance, that not only did we put it into place but we also made it retroactive.

Now a minister is saying that we are reviewing the process to see if there is something else we might be able to do. On both accounts, the former Stephen Harper government failed our troops. I wonder if the member would provide further comment on that.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I would be very pleased to provide further comment on that. Actually, when the same interdepartmental committee that you are dealing with right now recommended the same benefits—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member to address comments to the Chair.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Excuse me, Madam Speaker. It is just so engaging. When the same interdepartmental committee that the government is dealing with right now recommended the same benefits be stripped from our troops in Afghanistan, the government cut the red tape to ensure troops received what they deserved. This decision about the hardship and risk pay was made by officials. We believed it was incorrect and the government intended to re-examine it. That was done.

The former VAC minister, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse, said that the decision was not appropriate and in that circumstance, we dealt with the department and we ensured the circumstances were taken care of.

On that note, for this situation, I want to quote the member's minister, who is on the record with a tabled response to an Order Paper question on January 30, in which he states, "All Canadian Armed Forces personnel serving at all Operation IMPACT Kuwait locations received Tax Relief effective October 5, 2014...to September 1, 2016".

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech, which helps us shed more light on the motion introduced today by my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, the official opposition's national defence critic. I also congratulate him on his excellent work advocating for our troops and pointing out the Liberal government's many shortcomings with respect to the men and women in our armed forces defending our country.

The motion is also supported by our deputy critic for national defence, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. He is also hard at work every day making the Minister of National Defence aware of the importance of our troops for Canada and the importance of treating them properly. Here is the motion:

Business of Supply

That the House call on the government to show support and appreciation for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces by reversing its decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit which provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

Like many of my colleagues in the House, I served my country in Canada's armed forces many years ago, though not for very long. I attended the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean for a few months as a cadet. The circumstances made it impossible for me to pursue my military career. However, several of my colleagues and friends at the time went on to pursue great and distinguished careers in the Canadian Forces. They have served their country in different parts of the world.

During my service, I developed an emotional bond with the Canadian Armed Forces that nothing can undo. I suspect all the men and women who have served their country in the Canadian Forces know what I am talking about. No matter how long we serve in the Canadian Forces, we always keep something that binds us to the men and women who defend our country and our freedom day after day.

The purpose of the motion is to support members of our military forces who are fighting backwards-thinking, murderous terrorists with no respect for human life. I am talking about the terrorist forces of ISIS.

I read an article published on February 28 in *Le Soleil*, in Quebec City, that astounded me. I was astounded by the comments made by a retired soldier who served his country abroad on numerous occasions, in particular in Afghanistan. There are two passages I would like to quote, the first of which is this:

"The motivation for being deployed has been taken away," added the man, who also believes the financial impact on those affected will be "considerable".

From the same article:

"The guys are definitely angry...They are losing a lot of money...There won't be much [money] left to compensate us for the danger and length of the missions. It is certainly going to be a factor..."

Near the Valcartier military base, several other soldiers spoke out against this measure to a journalist:

"It's crap," one of them spat. "I was supposed to be deployed to Mali, but I'm not so sure anymore," he said, adding that this was a real step backwards.

These people expect to be treated properly, particularly when they put their lives, their families' health and their relatives' health in danger simply by being in danger zones.

The decision to eliminate this tax exemption, which may be worth almost \$10,000 for a six-month period, is making soldiers angry, as well as putting their families in danger. Their families sometimes have trouble making ends meet when their breadwinner is away from Canada for six or nine or even 12 months, in some cases, not to mention the problems associated with distance and worry.

• (1700)

The men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces leave their families voluntarily. They travel abroad to do a dangerous job and they expose themselves to risks. They miss important family occasions, like birthdays and graduations. They sometimes suffer physical, emotional or mental injuries that are often associated with

serious consequences both for them directly and for their family members.

Why do these men and women make all these sacrifices? They do it to protect us from potential and actual enemies. They do it because they are concerned about the dangers that lie in wait for our country. They do it because it is their purpose in life and because they want to do it. They do not do it for the money. I want to be very clear on that point. I have never met a soldier who decided to be deployed to a danger zone solely for the money we are talking about today. These men and women do not do it for that. They do not voluntarily put themselves in danger for \$10,000 for a six-month period.

The money they were paid was a mark of recognition for their efforts and the additional risks, no more nor less. Everyone knows that they do these jobs in a very risky environment.

The Liberals have known for a long time that Canadian troops deployed in the fight against ISIS are not paid adequately for the hardships and risks associated with their deployment. The government has changed the rules, while many soldiers have volunteered and are in the theatre of operations, as we speak. Unfortunately, that decision was made after the troops agreed to be deployed.

Could it be that the Liberal government wants to discourage soldiers from volunteering for dangerous missions so they will be available for other missions? I do not think so. Decisions like that are not made on the assumption that people will avoid taking part in missions. A decision like that cannot be made for that reason.

Moreover, the government is hoping for a seat on the UN Security Council, something we would be remiss not to mention in a file like this one. However, it is important that our soldiers know where they stand. By eliminating this benefit, the Liberals are deceiving the troops, denying them the hard-earned money that they were expecting and that they deserve.

I would like to take a few moments to point out that this Liberal government is still working on running up its deficit, which has become much more massive than what it had promised during the campaign in the fall of 2015.

Today, during question period, I had the opportunity to address the Minister of Transport on the possible sale of Canadian airports in order to finance a possible infrastructure bank, something that will perhaps be announced on March 22, when the budget is tabled. We see that the Liberals are currently looking for every opportunity to make money. Every dollar counts, because they are currently trying to pay the interest on the Minister of Finance's credit card. The ATM ran out and now we are living on the Minister of Finance's line of credit and credit card. Nearly everyone is being called on to do their bit. I hope the government is not wanting to top up its kitty on the backs of our troops. That would be completely insane.

I am very happy to learn that all parties in the House will be supporting the motion. I am glad to learn that there is a sincere and genuine desire to resolve the situation for our troops. What I do not understand is why this has not been done already.

In closing, I would like to quote a comment that the Minister of National Defence made earlier today in his speech:

Business of Supply

• (1705)

[English]

“The highly political approach that the opposition has taken to this issue may give Canadians a false impression that our Canadian men and women are demanding more money in exchange, but this is not the case. Our women and men chose to sacrifice a great deal in order to serve their country. We want to honour that spirit of sacrifice to ensure we have a fair, transparent compensating system for them”.

[Translation]

That is what the minister said today. If the minister wishes to do away with the whole political approach, then let him stop waffling and simply do something. He has the power and he can decide immediately to make sure that our men and women who serve in dangerous places receive the fair compensation they deserve.

Once again, I am very happy to see the support for this motion from all parties in the House.

I would again like to congratulate my two colleagues who have worked very hard in recent weeks and months to raise this problem here in the House.

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one could be confused by the comments across the way. One would think we had cancelled the F-35 mission in Iraq, based on the glory the opposition members try to paint themselves in when it comes to military procurement support for our veterans. I would remind them that it was the F-18 mission that was suggested so that we could pursue peace in a different way. That is instructive.

If we have made a mistake on this side, the mistake we made was believing that a party that wrapped itself in the military so tightly and so consistently would have solved this problem before we took office. If anything, our assumption that the Conservatives actually treated the military fairly was the problem.

The policy in question has been in place since 2003. The adjustment was not made by the Government of Canada. It is a procedural and bureaucratic problem in the way the military assigns these credits. The issue is this: are there any other mistakes the Harper government, and the survivors opposite, left behind that we should be paying attention to that we can fix? Quite clearly, when it comes to veterans, procurement, and compensation for our veterans, there are huge mistakes that have been made, and we would love to fix them, because quite clearly, the Conservatives did not. What other problems did they leave for us to fix that they are going to blame us for?

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the main mistake we made was to let them win the last election. However, I promise that we are going to try to correct that mistake in 2019. That is the only answer I have for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development for Housing and Urban Affairs.

What I want to say is that when the bureaucrats try to apply something that makes no sense, what has to be done, and what we did in the previous government, is to show leadership, as the then Minister of Defence did. He simply acted as a minister of defence who is responsible for his troops should do, and ensured that people received the fair compensation they deserved. That is how a minister of defence who cares about his troops should act.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe what we should do as we are winding down the debate on the motion is just take some time to acknowledge the valuable role our Canadian Armed Forces play. That is something that is universally recognized on all sides of the House. They do an incredible job. They make not only parliamentarians but all Canadians very proud in the efforts they make to protect our sovereignty and our values and so forth.

I would ask my colleague across the way to recognize and possibly even agree with me on how important the job our Canadian Forces do is and that it is to be recognized and applauded.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I never thought I would say this in the House, but I agree with the parliamentary secretary 100% about the importance of that.

I hate to say it, but I have to agree with him because, for once, he said the right thing. That hardly ever happens in the House, but I have to acknowledge that it did just now. What I would like to see is the government act accordingly.

Can my hon. colleague tell that to the hon. Minister of National Defence and ask him to take action now, tomorrow, to give soldiers the compensation they are entitled to?

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, I would let him know there are only about two and a half minutes remaining in the time provided under the business of supply this afternoon, but we will get him started just the same.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to this issue.

The compensation of our men and women in the military is of course one that we take as a cherished responsibility and an honour to live up to. We have created systems and processes to properly compensate those men and women who find themselves on combat missions, who find themselves in harm's way on peace missions, wherever they are deployed to make sure that their families are taken care of, that the reward for their sacrifice to this country is properly acknowledged.

Private Members' Business

There are systems in place to measure and to distribute this income to these families and to deliver the salaries and from time to time they need to be modernized and revised, especially in a world where conditions can change on what looks like a rescue mission that suddenly can become a civil war that suddenly becomes something even more catastrophic than that.

We have to redesign and rethink sometimes the policies that provide compensation to members of our armed forces. This is clearly the situation we find ourselves in now. This policy has existed since 2003. It is largely administered and assessed by an ongoing process inside the Canadian Armed Forces. When we discovered what had happened, we took steps to rectify the situation and made a commitment to the House and we will follow through on that commitment because we have the responsibility to do that not just as a government, but as parliamentarians.

We have challenges and those challenges need to escape the prism of partisan politics sometimes, although we have our fun across the floor, and we need to understand that this commitment to families is a sacred one, just as our commitment to veterans is a sacred one. We can all up our game on this and provide much more certainty, much more clarity, and much more fairness in the way in which these benefits are assessed and assigned and delivered. That is the commitment that this government has made. We can see it across all of government when it comes to veterans, whether it is dealing with homelessness, whether it is dealing with Veterans Affairs and survivor benefits, whether it is the motion that was passed unanimously in the House around PTSD. We made a commitment and this government will honour that commitment because this government takes that commitment seriously.

While there has been back and forth today, I think I can speak for all members of the House when I say that we can do better, we will do better, and we will do it together as a Parliament in this year.

• (1715)

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 Tuesday, March 21, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am unfortunately not the member for Calgary Forest Lawn but I will nonetheless try my hand at time travel. I think if you seek it you will find unanimous consent of the House to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-323 be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having seconded Bill C-323 introduced by the member for York—Simcoe, I am delighted to speak to the very meaningful benefits this legislation would bring not only to the owners who preserve and restore heritage properties of all sorts, but to the communities where they are located, as well as to our national cultural heritage.

I represent a riding which has a magnificent respect for the original townsite of old Thornhill, applying its own regulations and encouragement of preservation and restoration under the Ontario Heritage Act. The City of Markham's heritage department offers short-term loans to owners wishing to embark on a restoration adventure, and upon an owner's commitment to conserve the heritage features of a designated property, the City of Markham will actually reduce annual property and education taxes by fully 30%. As well, since 2000, Markham has presented annual heritage awards to owners who have completed restoration projects in compliance with heritage standards.

I am pleased to share with members the pride that Cilla and I share, having survived the roller-coaster perturbation involved in the restoration of 111 John Street, in Thornhill.

The central part of the designated house, built in 1842 by a miller named John Lane, first served to house the coopers who constructed the wooden barrels to carry cornmeal and flour back to England. It was effectively a bunkhouse. The house did have a late Victorian expansion, but its 19th century charm survived even the dilapidated, fixer-upper state in which we found it and acquired it in 2007.

To make a long story short, our marriage survived the top-to-bottom three-year restoration of the house, and we were honoured to receive a Heritage Markham Award of Excellence for our restoration project. Just to clear the air and to assure this House that I support Bill C-323 for its high-minded goals of celebrating restoration and maintenance of Canada's heritage buildings far beyond old Thornhill, indeed right across Canada, and not for personal gain from the very reasonable benefits that this law would provide, let me inform members that because a heritage property demands constant loving care and repair that many homeowners today might find challenging, Cilla and I, unfortunately, no longer own this home.

When I had a close call with mortality a couple of years ago, I received stern spousal direction that I was no longer to venture up onto the roof to carry out maintenance and fixes or to wield my trusty chainsaw as an occasionally necessary high-level amateur arborist. So, reluctantly, we sold to, we hope, we believe, a family as enchanted with this heritage property as we were.

Private Members' Business

Let me thank members for indulging this explanation of my fixation with historic properties, modest and grand, and let me return to the very important specifics of Bill C-323.

My colleague, the member for York—Simcoe, in his introduction of this private member's legislation, reminded the House of the very real public interest in the preservation and restoration of heritage properties. He spoke directly to the cost burden that rehabilitation is usually more expensive than alternatives such as demolition and a replacement new build, but certainly it is far less expensive than the priceless loss of physical Canadian heritage in a tear-down.

He pointed out that the bill would help owners who are preserving historic places with a modest portion of the cost of delivering this important public benefit. This bill would create a 20% tax credit for rehabilitation of recognized, designated historic places. The bill would also create an accelerated capital cost allowance for eligible capitalized costs incurred under the same conditions as the tax credit.

• (1720)

What exactly are eligible costs? Under the provisions of Bill C-323, these are costs that would include construction, insurance, development, site improvement, as well as basic professional fees. These eligible costs would exclude acquisition, cosmetic and furnishing costs of such a structure.

Our sponsor, the member for York—Simcoe, reminded us that not so many years ago, the government implemented a pilot program with a tax credit and end goal such as the one this bill would create. He cited the fact that the response doubled, on average, the property values of the respective structures and that the tax credit actually incentivized significant GST and corporate tax revenues.

Many countries in different parts of the world have heritage grants and associated programs. The most similar policy, I believe, is the tax credit program in the United States, which provides a 20% tax credit on costs related to the rehabilitation of designated historic buildings, as well as a 10% credit on non-designated buildings built before 1936. The program in the United States was implemented in 1976. It is widely recognized as having been exceptionally successful with over 41,000 projects certified. As well, the program has been found to have a net positive impact on the United States Treasury of \$5 billion over the life of the program to date.

Under Bill C-323, eligibility for the tax credit and accelerated write-off of any restoration project would have to be first certified by an architect, following Parks Canada's easily available published standards for conservation of historic places.

The integrity of this evaluation process is ensured through the use of criteria that are not only recognized across Canada, but internationally. There are many programs in different parts of the world which have adopted the Parks Canada criteria for their work in designating and recognizing historic buildings.

Although this process is very exacting, it need not be burdensome or costly and can, we believe, be very easily applied to the detail and the coverage provisions of Bill C-323. The Parks Canada historic sites record with regard to major structures and locations, I am sure hon. members recognize this, is world-class. Application of the Parks Canada historic sites standards to fulfill the provisions of Bill

C-323 would be scalable, and again, as I said, not burdensome or costly.

In closing, I would echo the words of my colleague from York—Simcoe in saying that Canadians will be much more likely to embrace the idea of having their heritage properties designated as historic if the bill is passed by the House. While the design of the legislative package is very modest in dollar terms, it would represent a very meaningful investment in our national cultural infrastructure.

I encourage all members of the House, all parties in the House, to stand in support of Bill C-323.

• (1725)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in this House on behalf of my constituents of Kingston and the Islands to speak in support of Bill C-323, an act to amend the Income Tax Act. I will begin by thanking my colleague for York—Simcoe for putting forward this substantive and very timely legislation.

My speech today will focus on three themes. First, I will address the importance of preserving heritage buildings. Second, I will draw from my experiences as a municipal politician to explain why I believe there is a desperate need for financial incentives to encourage heritage restoration. Third, I will speak to the economic benefits associated with the restoration of historically designated buildings.

In his opening remarks during the first hour of debate, the sponsor of the bill talked about the sense of awe he feels when walking through historic sites. While we may come from different parts of the province and indeed different sides of this House, I can say that I share his sense of awe when I visit one of the many historic properties in my riding of Kingston and the Islands.

These buildings tell a story about who we are and where we came from. They impart important lessons from the past and remind us about the challenges we have overcome and the accomplishments we have had in this country. In short, they highlight and bring to life those special moments in our history that are worth remembering.

I have often said in this House that I am proud to represent Canada's first capital, which has firmly etched its place in our country's history. Kingston's rich history and culture endures and is kept alive by our treasured heritage properties. To give members some perspective, about 120 buildings in Kingston belong on the national register of historic places, and more than 1,000 are listed on the city's municipal register and designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. These include nationally important historic sites, such as the Kingston Penitentiary, the original CN station, and the Nine Mile Point lighthouse on Simcoe Island.

This brings me to the second focal point of my speech, which is the need for real incentives to restore and maintain heritage properties.

Private Members' Business

Growing up in Kingston, I was fortunate to learn from a young age to appreciate the historic value of built heritage. It was later on as mayor that I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with owning or acquiring a heritage building. The reality is that many of our most prominent historical buildings are facing an uncertain future, and I would like to talk about a few examples to illustrate what I mean.

The outer station in Kingston is a designated historical site that was built by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1856, 11 years before Confederation, to serve as a halfway point between Montreal and Toronto. It holds a special role in our history and was used by Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, in his travels between Kingston and this place during the early formative years of our country. Among other notable individuals, King George VI famously arrived there on a visit to Kingston in 1939. The station was closed in 1974, and despite its historical importance, it now sits derelict and in ruins. This is what is known as demolition by neglect, a reality that, unfortunately, is far too common. After years of deterioration, the city has estimated that it would cost nearly \$4 million for CN, the current owners, to repair this building and clean up the contamination of the land.

Another perfect example of a challenging situation in my riding is that of the Nine Mile Point lighthouse, which was erected on the western tip of Simcoe Island in 1833 to guide vessels navigating the northeastern waters of Lake Ontario. As the oldest lighthouse on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes, and possibly in the entire Great Lakes, it is now retired from its operational duties and has appropriately been nominated for designation under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. The problem is that any potential new owner of this historic lighthouse might be responsible for the significant cost of maintaining this property and remediating it appropriately, as required by federal and provincial laws.

Restoration in both cases has definite community support, but the projects present a significant undertaking, and I am concerned that right now we do not have adequate incentives to encourage anyone to take them on.

• (1730)

Bill C-323 proposes a modest 20% tax credit for rehabilitation work done on designated historic buildings and a three-year accelerated write-off period for spending on these buildings. This would give interested parties the incentive to take on these projects.

These measures would increase the confidence of current and future owners of historic properties, encouraging them to rehabilitate and reuse historically significant buildings and avoid the grim alternatives of demolition or demolition by neglect.

This incentive is also a win-win in situations where the federal government is trying to divest of a building that no longer has an operational use. Nine Mile Point Lighthouse, Kingston Penitentiary, and Outer Station are all examples of federally owned properties, or those owned by a crown corporation, that are considered surplus and are no longer operational. While the federal government will not outright demolish these historic properties, it is also not required to do anything to preserve them.

The options are to let them remain as a liability on the federal government's balance sheet, in which case they will slowly deteriorate over time because the federal government is not required to repair them, as a third party would, or find a way to transfer them to an interested party who will actually invest in rehabilitation.

The tax credit proposed in Bill C-323 would make the second option more feasible. It would make it less likely that federal properties will be demolished by neglect, which is exactly what has happened in the case of the Outer Station in my riding.

When we talk about heritage properties, we often think about a few particularly special landmarks. I have just named a few that stand out in my community, and I am sure every member could do the same for their own ridings. However, we have to remember that built heritage also includes homes owned by private landowners, who face high costs to maintain their properties over time. As the member for Kootenay—Columbia noted in his speech during the last hour of debate, owners of historic buildings typically incur an additional 21% in costs, so it seems fair and appropriate to offset those costs with a 20% tax credit.

I will now move to my third and final theme, which is the economic benefit of the tax credit. To estimate the financial impact of this bill, we can look to the United States, which has had a historic tax credit program since 1981. The program has been a resounding success at stimulating economic growth and creating jobs.

So far, over \$23 billion in federal credits have generated more than \$28 billion in additional tax revenue and leveraged over \$120 billion in private investment; 2.4 million jobs have been created, and tens of thousands of historic properties have benefited.

In Canada, a pilot program was launched in 2003 that yielded equally promising results. Over the five-year pilot project, \$21.5 million in federal contributions supported 49 projects and leveraged \$177 million or more than eight times more in private sector investment.

We should make policies based on the best evidence, and in this case, the evidence is very clear. Incentivizing heritage rehabilitation not only serves an important public goal but also stimulates exactly the kind of economic activity we need right now. It will generate considerable private investment and will create well-paying jobs in construction, skilled trades, and many other fields.

In light of Canada's 150th birthday, I cannot imagine a more appropriate time to be having this discussion. The experience of visiting a historic site can teach us much more about our past than reading a textbook, and we should not deprive future generations of this opportunity. If we do nothing, we risk losing these national treasures to demolition or demolition by neglect, which unfortunately is happening right now in my community.

Private Members' Business

We need to positively reward the goodwill of Canadians who are acting in the public interest by preserving our built heritage. To ensure our heritage buildings can be enjoyed by current and future generations, we need to get serious about rehabilitation, and we must act now before it becomes too costly or impossible to do so. My colleague has put forward this bill to do exactly that, which I am proud to support.

To conclude, I hope all members will think hard about the significant cultural and economic benefits that this bill could have to their communities and throughout the country.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to speak to Bill C-323.

I was here when the sponsor introduced the bill. I really liked his speech during the first hour of debate because I have seen and visited most of the buildings he mentioned. Needless to say, his speech made me feel quite nostalgic. I thank the member for York—Simcoe for this bill, and I want to start off by pledging him my support.

Historic buildings in the riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou are a valuable part of our heritage, our history, and our culture. I am in favour of maintaining our historic buildings, but the cost of repairing and maintaining are at times prohibitive, especially in my riding's northernmost communities.

For example, Village-Minier-de-Bourlamaque is a site of definite historical value. It is on the Canadian Register of Historic Places because of its connection to the 1930s gold rush in Abitibi.

Between 1927 and 1950, many men looking for work came to Abitibi hoping to find a job. Village-Minier-de-Bourlamaque was built in 1935 by Lamaque Gold Mines Limited to house the miners. It has a very particular architectural style. The next time you are passing through Abitibi, Mr. Speaker, I invite you to stop and visit the mining village. The site has two kinds of residential structures, namely, the workers' houses and the posh homes of the former mine managers, who were called “boss” at the time, even in French.

Everything still exhibits the unique character of the 1930s village. Most of the houses in the village are still inhabited today, and the owners are responsible for maintaining the historic character when they do renovations. Conservation and original appearance are important to safeguarding the heritage and drawing tourists to the village, not only for the city of Val-d'Or but the entire Abitibi-Témiscamingue region.

Very few people know that one of the first buildings in the Abitibi region was built in 1836, namely, the Sainte-Clotilde church in Kitcisakik. Still standing today, this church was built on the fur trade with Algonquin trappers from the area. It is now a designated religious heritage site in Quebec. It is one of the first buildings built in my riding. Dating back to 1836, it is nearly 200 years old.

• (1740)

[*English*]

In Whapmagoostui, which is at the limit of James Bay and Hudson's Bay, we find sites such as the Church of St. Edmund, constructed in 1879. Historic sites are important to maintain. It is

critical that our history is understood and remembered, so that we can maintain an understanding of our past so that it is not forgotten.

Additionally, promotion of restoration efforts will create good, skilled jobs and promote economic development, while at the same time encourage tourism and promote respectful development while restoration efforts can help reduce environmental impacts of new building construction. This act would allow those struggling to afford the costs of rehabilitation projects to move forward.

However, it would also provide handouts to wealthy people who are not in need of assistance whatsoever. It does not seem reasonable to me that we should subsidize costs to rehabilitate these historic buildings while there is also a housing crisis in this country. I want clarity that the revenues lost from this bill will not impact Canada's ability to address the need for social housing in this country. As an indigenous person, I am very sensitive to that issue.

This bill gives me a chance to talk about the different priorities that a government needs to balance. A government has a responsibility toward the people who live within its borders. We all know that in Canada we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees all people the same right. However, Canadian governments have shown that their priorities do not include ensuring the same standards of programs and services for indigenous people that they provide to other Canadians.

In general, I question the government's housing policy. However, today I question more specifically how a bill like Bill C-323 will respond to the current housing needs in indigenous communities. Unfortunately, due to Canada's colonial history, forced relocation, land appropriations, and poor government infrastructure in indigenous communities, we do not have many heritage properties. Therefore, if we are to implement a bill like this one, which will potentially reduce government revenues by millions of dollars annually, what will this mean for the indigenous people and indigenous communities in desperate need of housing? Will the government increase revenues elsewhere to ensure that the human rights of indigenous people are upheld?

Private Members' Business

Through the rules of the Indian Act, colonial governments have created the housing crisis that indigenous communities are experiencing. Under the act, restrictions on land ownership often prevent the development of housing programs. It is estimated that by 2031, the housing shortage on reserves will rise to 115,000 units. In order to bring the number of people living in each home on reserve down to the Canadian average of 2.5 persons per home, an additional 80,000 first nations homes are needed right now, yet the 2016 federal budget provided funding for first nations housing of just \$206.6 million, which is enough to pay for 300 new homes, the servicing of 340 new housing lots, and the renovation of about 1,400 homes. To use the housing problem in my riding of Nunavik as another example, the aboriginal peoples Senate committee hearing on housing was told that Nunavik needs over 1,100 houses immediately. The \$50 million included in budget 2016 is less than a quarter of the funds needed to address that shortage.

I have been asked many times by many colleagues on both sides of the House what the most important issue is facing indigenous people today, and what the government should do now to make reparations of historic injustices. Indigenous issues in this country have been neglected for so long that every single issue has become a priority.

• (1745)

[Translation]

I have one minute left. I just want to say that the NDP will support Bill C-323 because we believe in restoring historic buildings that are part of our heritage. Obviously, we also believe that it is important to understand how expensive these renovations are.

We will seek to amend the bill during review in committee in order for the tax credit to also be offered to people with a low or medium income. A billionaire can afford to renovate an old building, but it is harder for the average Canadian or low-income earners.

[English]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to rise today to debate Bill C-323. Before I do so, I want to thank my colleague, the member for York—Simcoe, for bringing forward the bill. As our opposition critic for Canadian heritage, I consider him to be a national treasure for his hard work on this file.

In fact, this is not the only private member's business he has brought forward. He also has two other motions on the Order Paper, Motion No. 67 and Motion No. 62, which are equally important matters that I hope the House will take up at some point. There is the recognition of Sir John A. Macdonald's summer home in Rivière-du-Loup, and Motion No. 62, which recognizes the birth place of the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker in Neustadt, Ontario, which is just outside my riding. It is an important historical marker in southern Ontario, recognizing an exceptional prime minister.

To the bill at hand, it is an important bill for our communities and for the preservation of our historical heritage properties across our great country. I have to admit that I have a soft spot for heritage buildings. There are many beautiful older buildings in my riding of Perth—Wellington, which I am proud to highlight from time to time. In fact, my Wellington county constituency office is in one such heritage building. It is a beautiful old post office. It was the Harriston

town post office for many years. Unfortunately, as often these older buildings do, it fell into a state of disrepair.

Shortly after I was elected, I was able to take a tour of the building and to see the state of repair it was in at the time. Thanks to a hard-working local family, it took ownership of the old post office and restored it to an exceptionally high level of standard. Now my constituency office in Wellington county is located in that building. It has been renamed the "Old Post" and is now home to a number of different local businesses and community groups. I am proud to have played a small role in the restoration of that building.

In Perth—Wellington, we also have other important sites, such as the Fryfogal Tavern and Arboretum. The Fryfogel Tavern is actually the last surviving site along the Huron Tract from the 1800s. It is an old building with a great degree of heritage and history associated with it. Its original proprietor, Sebastian Fryfogel, was a Swiss national who came to Canada at the time. He served as the first acting warden of Perth county. He served as a tax collector for the county and was the local militia leader. He had a strong history in the country.

Currently, the Stratford Perth Heritage Foundation is working to have that site designated as a national historic site. If it is successful, it would be the first national historical site in Canada to have a Swiss connection. Being of Swiss heritage myself, I find it is an important issue to highlight because it is an important site. I look forward to seeing Parks Canada review that documentation to hopefully make it a national historical site.

With 2017 upon us, and the 150th anniversary of Confederation, preserving and protecting our national heritage is important, now more than ever. Bill C-323 certainly would help us to do that.

As all members will know, rehabilitation and preservation of historic and heritage buildings is not necessarily easy. Nor is it inexpensive. When dealing with century-plus old buildings, the wiring is no longer up to code and accessibility standards have not been kept up to code. In many cases, neglected roofs need to be replaced, insulation needs to be redone, and windows need reinstallation in a way that preserves the historic and heritage nature of those buildings. Unfortunately, it is often not economically or financially viable to undertake these important renovations, so buildings are often demolished or, as the member for Kingston and Islands mentioned earlier, are left to be demolished by neglect. This is unfortunate because we lose a part of our history when we lose these important buildings.

Bill C-323 proposes to introduce a tax credit for expenses related to the rehabilitation of a historic property and will establish a tax deduction for the capital costs of property used in the course of historic properties rehabilitation. This will provide the owners of historical properties with a tax credit of up to 20% of the cost of rehabilitating the property, which will incentivize owners to restore their properties and assist them in their efforts to do so. In short, it makes it more affordable to preserve historical buildings, thus allowing more of our great historical architecture to remain standing rather than be demolished.

Private Members' Business

• (1750)

Bill C-323 would also create an accelerated capital cost allowance for eligible capitalized costs incurred during the same conditions of the tax credit. It would do so by allowing a minor reduction on the owner's income tax for the costs of rehabilitating the building. This would ensure that when owners of an historic property undertake restoration work at personal expense they are compensated. The restoration of a historic property, after all, is indeed a public good and it is only fair that, when individuals do the work at their own personal expense, we as a country are able to help in some way.

I understand there are some concerns that have been brought forward by different people about this bill, but I think that it strikes the right balance in preserving our heritage but also incentivizing individuals while respecting the public coffers as well. There are certain guidelines included in this bill. First, not any building qualifies. The building must first be on the National Register of Historic Places. Second, an architect must certify that the eligible building has undergone rehabilitation in accordance with the standards and guidelines for the conservation of historic places in Canada, and this will ensure that proper rehabilitation work has been done in accordance with the standards. It also incorporates a 10-year limit that the tax credit can be used. This strikes the right balance in terms of providing adequate support but not becoming too high a cost on the federal treasury.

I would also like to remind hon. members in this House that this bill is supported by a number of heritage and historical groups, including the National Trust for Canada, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving our national heritage. In fact, the organization appeared with a brief before the Standing Committee on Finance, and the brief stated, "The federal tax system and federal spending are vital instruments shaping the ability of Canadians to protect and revitalize heritage places". The brief went on to recommend that the government should introduce a federal rehabilitation tax incentive for heritage properties in Canada. Bill C-323 would do such a thing. It would help us preserve our national heritage buildings and our national collective heritage.

Again, I want to congratulate the member for York—Simcoe for bringing forward this important bill. It is an exceptionally pertinent and important way of preserving our heritage buildings, and we as parliamentarians should make every effort possible to encourage those who own heritage buildings to undertake the necessary work to keep them in good repair.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Canadians proudly stand upon thousands of years of Canadian history and heritage. From the breathtaking totem poles that line the British Columbia coast, to the Algonquin wigwams that housed indigenous peoples on the unceded land upon which this Parliament currently sits, to Cape Spear Lighthouse on Newfoundland's eastern tip, to Fort Rodd Hill on B.C.'s Vancouver Island, to even the Justice Building down the road, the history reflected in our country's built heritage is simply astounding.

In this our nation's capital, we are surrounded by structures whose foundational stones were similarly foundational to the country we now call Canada. They herald the amazing accomplishments we

have had together and serve as a reminder of the chapters in our history that we have not yet atoned for.

Throughout my 32 years working with Parks Canada, I was incredibly lucky to come face to face with Canada's built heritage every day. Through my work with the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and Parks Canada's national historic sites branch, I saw the impact our heritage has on communities and heard the stories people told about their historic sites.

In Saskatchewan, Batoche National Historic Site reminds residents of the independent spirit of the northwest resistance. In Yukon, Dawson City returns us to the excitement of the Klondike gold rush, while in British Columbia, Colwood's Fisgard Lighthouse lets people on the open waters know they have reached home, just as it has done since 1860.

Across the country, Canada's built heritage reminds us of where we came from and where we have been along the way. From the smallest rural towns to our grandest cities, the history contained within these buildings forms what it means to call our communities home.

When I think about built heritage in my riding of Cloverdale—Langley City, I think of George Lawrence House or Matheson House and what these places meant to the origins of both Surrey and Langley. While perhaps only the most ardent heritage buffs across Canada would be able to call upon their history, they have a profound value to the residents of my riding.

This is what makes heritage so valuable to maintain across the country. Everyone can think of a few national historic sites that inspire awe and instill wonder, but what makes them so valuable is their effect on the individual. Just as I take pride in the historic sites in my community, I am sure everyone in the House can identify a building, an area, or a district in their own riding without which their community would not be the same.

As the National Trust for Canada said, Canada's communities are made up of historic places that define our cultural identity, give shape and texture to our urban and rural communities, and attract tourist dollars. Yet every day, these places are being destroyed through desertion, decay, and demolition.

Today I would like to discuss Bill C-323 and measures that I firmly believe will benefit all Canadians. This discussion centres on three fundamental considerations concerning how this legislation would create tangible environmental, financial, and social benefits.

Canada's home-building industry is one our country's largest. It provides enormous economic benefits to our national economy and is the livelihood for many thousands of middle-class Canadians. This sector should be stimulated and encouraged, but we must do so in a way that is also environmentally responsible.

Private Members' Business

In most Canadian municipalities, home building is a major contributor to landfill waste. For example, Alberta's provincial department of the environment found that 25% of the province's landfill waste was generated by construction. By promoting the preservation of existing buildings, much of this discarded waste could be avoided, preserving natural resources and limiting the release of landfill greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, the preservation and maintenance of existing housing stock has consistently been shown to decrease potential CO₂ emissions. According to the National Trust, if every heritage property in Canada were to be restored rather than demolished and replaced with a new structure, this would represent the avoidance of CO₂ emissions equivalent to the annual energy use of approximately 14.83 million homes. To put this in a more familiar context, in the city of Ottawa, which Statistics Canada listed as having 151,495 single detached homes in 2011, this energy savings would meet the energy needs of all of Ottawa's single family homes for approximately 98 years. This is not just a lot of heritage meaningfully conserved. It is an incredibly positive environmental initiative.

Despite this, there is a frequently cited argument that suggests that tearing down heritage properties is in fact environmentally prudent. The logic behind this claims that heritage properties are equipped with out of date furnishings and technology that would otherwise help reduce their environmental footprint. Despite the fact that newly constructed homes are often more environmentally efficient, the resources needed to demolish and construct a new home means that it takes several decades for the new structure to become a net environmental benefit over the existing heritage property.

As the Preservation Green Lab reported in its study, "The Greenest Building", it takes anywhere from 10 to 80 years for a new building that is 30% more efficient than an average-performing existing property to overcome, through efficient operations, the negative climate change impacts related to its construction.

● (1755)

The environmental benefits to heritage preservation are easy to see and an indication of the importance of the federal government's role in actively promoting it as an environmentally superior practice. Just as environmental protection benefits all Canadians, Bill C-323 would lead to equally comprehensive financial benefits.

To more closely examine the economic ramifications of Bill C-323, it is worth looking at the experience of our neighbours to the south. In 1981, the United States passed legislation creating a 25% federal tax credit for restoration of heritage sites. This built on legislation that was first introduced in 1976. In the three and a half decades since then, it is estimated that \$23.1 billion in federal tax credits have generated in excess of \$120.8 billion in private investment in historic buildings. This is roughly a 5:1 ratio of private to public investment, all of which ultimately ended back in the domestic U.S. economy.

Not only did the U.S. federal government's heritage restoration tax credit benefit the restoration industry, it boosted the entire national economy. This is due to the money multiplier effect, which explains how money being spent in one industry is eventually recycled into the broader civic, provincial, and national economy. If workers are

paid to restore a heritage home, they may spend that money at Tim Hortons, whose employees will go on to, say, get a haircut, at which point the barber will buy sports equipment for his daughter. This cycle is essential to a government's economic considerations, and means that money invested in one area will necessarily benefit Canadians across the country.

In the United States, the confluence between public and private investments in heritage restoration has created great economic benefit. As the National Trust for Canada estimated, while the U.S. federal government spent \$23.1 billion in restoration tax credits over the last 40 years, this credit resulted in an additional \$28.1 billion in tax revenue, a net gain of \$5 billion in tax revenue for that country. In short, the U.S. federal government made money by promoting heritage restoration.

In addition, heritage tourism represents a significant contributor to Canada's economy. Tourism is a multi-billion dollar a year industry, and it is estimated that cultural tourism accounts for one-third of that market. Reflecting the importance of this industry, the Canadian Tourism Commission reports that heritage tourism represents the past visitation of 34.5 million Americans and 2.6 million Canadian tourists.

As I have outlined above, I strongly believe that the preservation of Canada's heritage is a noble goal in and of itself. With that being said, however, the United States example shows how heritage preservation creates tangible benefits to society on the whole.

Based on the estimates of the National Trust, whose tireless efforts have left an indelible legacy on Canada's built heritage, since 1981, the United States heritage restoration tax credit has directly led to the preservation of over 41,000 historic properties that would have otherwise likely been left to neglect or demolition. This alone is a remarkable achievement, but it is the impacts on the broader society that make me believe Canada would be well served by a similar measure.

Along with tens of thousands of properties saved, the U.S. tax credit is estimated to have led to the creation of over 525,000 housing units, including 146,000 dedicated to low- and medium-income housing. In every corner of the country, we hear concerns about housing affordability. In my riding of Cloverdale—Langley City, I can safely say it is the topic about which I hear the most from my constituents.

Private Members' Business

Today, we are debating legislation that would help address Canada's growing housing issue, but this is not the only benefit that Bill C-323 would deliver to Canadians across the country. In tandem with an increase in housing units, the U.S. tax credit is credited with creating 2.4 million jobs. These are reliable, middle-class positions across a multitude of sectors, and would ultimately benefit the entire Canadian economy. This money would overwhelmingly go to small and medium enterprises based in Canada, and the increase in employment would give communities across Canada a welcome boost.

Not only is heritage good for communities as they currently exist, but it benefits community rehabilitation. One can think of communities across Canada, such as Toronto's Distillery District, Winnipeg's Exchange District, and Vancouver's Chinatown, where heritage and culture are inseparably entwined.

This bill would not guarantee the preservation of all heritage buildings in Canada, but it is a great first start. In Canada's 150th year, I can think of nothing more appropriate than signalling our support for both the history of this great country and the welfare of the people living in it today. In this spirit, I offer my support for Bill C-323 and encourage my colleagues in this House to do the same.

• (1800)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this idea of a heritage tax credit to preserve the historical aspects of our community and make them richer places to live is an idea that is long overdue, an idea whose time has come.

I want to thank all those who have spoken in support of this from all sides of the House. In particular, I want to thank the members for Cloverdale—Langley City and Kingston and the Islands, not just for their excellent workmanlike detailed addresses, but also for all their hard work in assisting me with this proposal.

It is indeed, as those addresses indicate, a non-partisan bill. This is not a partisan effort. It is very much a product of the work of previous governments, both Liberal and Conservative, under which the foundations of this tax credit have been developed in this proposal, and it is a benefit to all of Canada. That is why all of us are indeed advocating for it.

I want to address a couple of criticisms that were made in the first hour of debate of the bill. The first is that its benefit, in terms of providing a tax credit, produced an inequality in that it was applying to some homeowners and not to others.

I would put it to the House that the inequality that exists is when we ask certain homeowners through a heritage designation to take on that private burden of supporting the public benefit. It is a real cost to them to have to support a heritage building. We are in fact working toward addressing that inequality by easing that burden somewhat, saying that if an individual is to take on the public burden of restoring a heritage building from which we all benefit, and at a much higher cost than normal construction, we will help ease that a little bit and take that step toward equality of providing that public benefit.

Another critique was, in fact, kind of the opposite. It was a suggestion that there are already tax credits in place for donations to preserve heritage buildings. Those tax credits apply to exactly the

people who will not be able to benefit from this tax credit, and the people who would be able to benefit from this tax credit cannot benefit from those already in place. Those are to non-profit organizations, not to private individuals or businesses who are being asked to preserve heritage buildings.

In fact, once again, we are filling a gap that exists. The criticism there is indeed misplaced, and in fact the bill goes some distance to level that playing field and improve that overall. I certainly want to set that record straight.

Finally, there is some suggestion that there are floodgates here, that with so many heritage properties, there is no way of knowing what the cost of this will be. In fact, people know well what the cost would be within the government, as they have assessed it, and it is a very modest cost compared with things like the project to restore these buildings here on Parliament Hill that are very important heritage buildings for our country. It is a small fraction of that, and in fact the entire design of the bill contains those costs and keeps them under control. It is a taxpayer-responsible bill.

Only properties on the national historic sites register would qualify, a relatively limited list. The credit would be only 20%, in contrast with the 25% in the U.S., and of course the capital cost allowance is not that much of a benefit; it is simply a changing of the period of time over which a normal writeoff would occur, to a little bit faster writeoff. Therefore the actual bottom line impact for the taxpayers is limited, but the incentive for the person or the business to undertake the heritage restoration is significant.

I think those critiques ring a little bit hollow. I appreciate them, but I think overwhelmingly we have an opportunity here to pull together and build stronger communities through supporting the restoration of heritage buildings in all our communities, those heritage buildings that make them so important.

That is why so many communities, municipal councils, have weighed in to support this. I will just read a list of some of them that have so far indicated their support: Pincher Creek, Alberta; Edwardsburgh/Cardinal, Ontario; City of New Westminster, British Columbia; Calgary, Alberta; Town of Halton Hills, Ontario; Town of Atikokan, Ontario; City of Windsor, Ontario; municipalité de Saint-Félix-de-Kingsey, Quebec; Township of Machar, Ontario; Town of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan; City of Victoria, British Columbia; municipalité de Palmarolle, Quebec; City of Terrace, British Columbia; District of Chetwynd, British Columbia; Ville de Saint-Lazare, Quebec; Ville de Cookshire-Eaton, Quebec; Town of Hearst, Ontario; municipalité de Pike River, Quebec; Municipality of Central Elgin, Ontario; County of Brant, Ontario; Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Ontario; Municipality of Kincardine, Ontario; Calder, Saskatchewan; Town of Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia.

• (1805)

I see that my time is up well before I can get to the end of that list, but it gives members some indication of the breadth and depth of support all across this country from municipal councils and the people who are charged by us day to day to preserve those communities, their built heritage, and to build great places to live. They support this; they are foursquare behind it. That is why I encourage all members of the House to express their support for this bill.

Adjournment Proceedings

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 22, 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.

•(1810)

[*Translation*]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this adjournment proceeding to come back to a question I asked the Minister of Transport in November 2016 regarding non-designated airports in Canada.

For the benefit of those watching us at home, I will sum up the situation. The 89 airports in Canada that are designated can receive services from the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. Unfortunately, there are more than 89 airports in Canada. Unfortunately, regional airports are non-designated and are not on this list.

The problem we have in Sherbrooke is that we have an airport with a runway long enough to accommodate large aircraft and a terminal large enough for security screening. However, ours is not among the 89 designated airports. Adding an airport to the list of designated airports is easy enough. There is a regulation for that. It is a matter of adding a schedule to the Canadian Aviation Security Regulations, 2012. The list of 89 designated airports can be found in the schedule of these regulations.

These regulations were created in response to the September 11 attacks to provide maximum security in our airports. The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority was also created. At the time, it was determined that 87 airports would be designated, because it was believed the level of risk justified their designation. A few years later, there was even a decision made to add two airports, in Mont-Tremblant and Red Deer. The mechanism is therefore quite simple.

Airports can be added to the list. At that time, the number of airports went from 87 to 89.

Sherbrooke has long been asking for what nine other airports are also asking for, which is to be added to the list. Just as we are asking to be added to the list, some airports that do have the designation are not even using it. Some airports in Canada are designated and are on the list of 89, but have no regular or commercial flights. Ultimately, the designation does not mean much. These airports are not in operation.

However, airports such as the Sherbrooke airport and others are ready to move forward. Sherbrooke had even signed an agreement in principle with an airline for commercial flights. Unfortunately, one of the conditions of the agreement was that security check points be set up in the airport, which did not happen under the previous government. The best they could do, and it is important to mention this, was to come up with a way for non-designated airports to set up screening check points anyway, but on a cost-recovery basis.

This is a viable solution for Sherbrooke. We are currently attempting to set up the necessary check points with this mechanism. However, the fact remains that the simplest and quickest solution would be to have Sherbrooke become the 90th designated airport. Another solution would be to remove an airport from the list, because it is just as easy to add one as it is to remove one. We could remove an airport that is not being used. There are some. We could keep the 89 designated airports if that is what the government absolutely wants to do. We could continue to have 89 designated airports substituting one for another.

My question is when does the government intend to propose an amendment to the regulation adding to the list of airports, or changing some of the current designations in order to keep the number of designated airports to 89?

•(1815)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising the issue of security screening services at small airports. This is an important issue because our government's goal is to develop a modern, efficient transportation system that supports a growing economy. Moreover, Canada's aviation sector is a key contributor to our standard of living, economy, connectivity to the world and prosperity.

Small airports and the air carriers that fly in and out of them play an important role in this sector. Aviation security is of considerable importance to this government. Canada has developed and maintained one of the most secure aviation systems in the world, one that is multi-layered, flexible and responsive to current issues and fully engages its national and international aviation security partners.

Of the 200 airports in Canada that handle some degree of commercial activity, 89 are designated by regulation for mandatory Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, or CATSA, screening. Aviation security in Canada takes a risk-based approach. Applying a risk-based approach means that we dedicate comparatively more time, resources, and energy to areas of the system with greater risk.

Adjournment Proceedings

As a result, passengers at lower risk airports do not undergo CATSA security screening. Over the past few years, several non-designated airports, including Sherbrooke Airport, have made requests to become designated in order to obtain security screening services from CATSA. Many of them have indicated that security screening will help attract airlines that could then offer routes to larger, designated airports, thereby increasing the airport's and local communities' economic development opportunities.

Over the past few years, Transport Canada and CATSA have worked closely with various airports, including the Sherbrooke Airport, to establish a viable screening solution on a cost-recovery basis, but ultimately, it is up to the airport operators to make a business decision to determine whether the screening services they desire are cost-effective.

To conclude, Canada has one of the strongest aviation security programs in the world, and we are committed to promoting the security of our aviation system by striking the right balance between security, efficiency, and fiscal responsibility, while paying close attention to risk.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and her detailed response. It seems to me that we got more answers this evening than in other adjournment debates, so I thank her for that.

She clearly understands the issue, which is that there is very little chance that an airline will decide to establish an air link between a non-designated airport and a designated one. That is the main problem for Sherbrooke. We have had difficulty getting air links for a long time because the airlines are not interested in landing in Sherbrooke, as my colleague said.

I am therefore wondering why the government did not decide instead to reassess the risk associated with each airport and rework the designations accordingly, since the easiest way to get air links is to be one of the 89 designated airports.

Why did the government not reassess the risk associated with each of those 89 airports and rework the list accordingly?

• (1820)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the need to support the economic growth of Canadian communities and the important role that small airports play in that regard.

A mechanism has been put in place to allow non-designated airports to pay to obtain security screening services. Last year, Transport Canada and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority talked to many small airport operators, including that of Sherbrooke, about how to implement security screening services on a cost-recovery basis in their airport.

We will continue to work with small airports that want to have security screening services.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am once again standing in the House to talk about

solutions to deal with Canada's long-standing problem of abandoned vessels in our marine environment.

The imperative we have talked about many times. There are hazards to navigation, visual pollution impacting tourism, a very strong threat of oil spills that can impact local jobs in the area of aquaculture, oil spill risks that can affect the marine environment and sensitive coastal ecology, and the fact that there is no government in Canada that will actually take ownership. This is a hole in jurisdiction that is recognized by all parties that we are working very hard to fix. It will make it easier for coastal communities if we do.

I also want to salute the patience and persistence of coastal communities. They have been trying ad hoc solutions one vessel at a time in the absence of the federal leadership that we are seeking. There are costs. I note it was picked up in the media just a few weeks ago, where a member of the legislative assembly in British Columbia, Andrew Weaver, who is the Green Party representative, quite improperly scolded the municipality of Oak Bay, saying that it should do what the municipality of Saanich has done. In fact, we cannot pit one community against the other.

His criticism also reveals a misunderstanding of the fact that if we leave this to the high-capacity municipalities to deal with issues in their own harbours, that squeezes problem vessels out into unincorporated areas or more remote regions, which is why, again and again, we have been calling for a comprehensive coast-wide solution to the problem of abandoned vessels.

Let us talk about solutions. My private member's bill, Bill C-219, proposes to make the Coast Guard the go-to agency on abandoned vessels. The men and women of the Coast Guard are already doing a good job. They are doing it off the side of their desk, but they do not have clear authority. My bill proposes to give them that authority, to make the Coast Guard the receiver of wrecks. We are also pushing very hard for full resources for the Coast Guard, so it can do that job as one of its central responsibilities, one that is well funded.

Other solutions that I have been proposing that the government supports are fiberglass recycling; finding new markets for these materials; boat amnesty, where people can bring in their boats; fixing vessel registration, which has really fallen into disrepair; and mechanisms to take a load off taxpayers, such as sending vessel registration funds to a fund, as Washington state has done, to deal with vessels on an emergency basis.

Adjournment Proceedings

Just this past week, I sat down with some local community leaders. We are planning our presentation to the AVICC convention, which is a local government association that represents the Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast local governments. On April 8 we are presenting together on solutions to deal with the abandoned vessel problem. This includes Ladysmith Mayor Aaron Stone, Stz'uminus Chief John Elliott, and one of the operators of the local marina, Rod Smith from Ladysmith Community Marina. They are asking what the details are of the coastal protection plan, and I am really hoping to be able to bring that to the convention April 8, so I can give some good news.

It was announced four months ago by the government that it is reopening a Coast Guard station in St. John's. I wish it was reopening the Comox Coast Guard station on my coast that the Liberal government closed. There were very few details otherwise, so I am hoping that the representative for the Minister of Transport can tell us when the legislation is coming, when the funding is going to be available to coastal communities, and what the specific mechanisms are that the government is proposing. I am concerned the only one that it has raised is criminalizing vessel abandonment, and I surely hope that is not a path the government is going to go down. We are looking for solutions on the ground.

• (1825)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith's concern about the need to systematically address the problems of abandoned, derelict, and wrecked vessels, and the impact they present for our coastal communities in particular. This is a problem that has been building for a long time.

Over the past year, our government has taken direct action to address several of these problem vessels. For example, our government has proceeded to the removal of the *Viki Lyne II* in Ladysmith harbour in British Columbia, and the dismantling and removal of the *MV Kathryn Spirit* in Beauharnois, Quebec. Both are under way.

However, this alone cannot be a vessel-by-vessel approach. We are committed to a broad, comprehensive strategy, and I am proud that our Prime Minister announced plans for this strategy on November 7, 2016, as part of our oceans protection plan. The cornerstone of our strategy is vessel owner responsibility. We believe that those who act irresponsibly when it comes to end-of-life vessel management should be held accountable. We know Canadians share this view. We heard it loud and clear in our national consultations.

Our government intends to table new legislation in 2017 that would prohibit the act of vessel abandonment while also enabling a more proactive approach to vessels before they become a bigger problem and more costly to remediate. Vessel owners would be responsible and liable for the costs associated with vessel cleanup. Alongside this new legislation, we will strengthen systems that allow for the identification of vessel owners so that we can hold to account those who act irresponsibly. We will also join 30 other countries and move to adopt the Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks. This would ensure vessel owners are fully liable and responsible for the costs of removal of a wreck resulting from a maritime accident or an act of nature. These new measures would mean that vessel owners would no longer be allowed to walk away

from a vessel they do not want or do not properly maintain without the possibility of sanctions.

Finally, we cannot ignore the suite of legacy vessels that are already affecting our coastlines and communities. While developing a longer-term solution, which I have already laid out, in the short term our government will support the cleanup of priority small vessels in our coastal communities, and assess the requirements for larger priority commercial vessels. Transport Canada is working closely with the Canadian Coast Guard and other federal partners so that we can leverage each department's expertise and make the most efficient use of our resources. We are also actively engaged with concerned governments, communities, and stakeholders across the country as we develop our plan, and they will be important partners moving forward.

The challenges and therefore the solutions are complex, but our government is demonstrating leadership on the issue, and we are confident we have the right approach.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's representative, the parliamentary secretary, echoing back our shared commitment to find a solution to this, but I am very concerned that the headline is the prohibition of vessel abandonment.

Such laws exist already, and the government should be enforcing them. Owners are already responsible and liable. Boat owners can already be taken to court to remove a vessel. We have examples right now, such as the *MV Farley Mowat* in Shelburne. The feds went to court to force the owner to pay fines, and to be arrested or imprisoned. That is happening already. The problem is that we cannot fine an owner who himself is derelict, unable to pay. Part of the problem is the great financial insecurity of people who just cannot keep up their vessels anymore.

Also, we cannot fine an owner that we cannot find. Vessel registration is a mess. I really want to have the government's assurance that this is a priority, that it will fix vessel registration, and make every owner pay into a fund that would then be available to deal with vessels on an emergency basis so that it is not paid on the backs of taxpayers.

• (1830)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I again take the opportunity to mention that in our efforts to restore and protect marine ecosystems and habitats as part of our \$1.5 billion oceans protection plan, we will be taking measures to address abandoned and derelict vessels in Canadian waters. This will include the introduction of new legislation to prohibit vessel abandonment, and based on a polluter pays principle, increase vessel owner responsibility and liability for derelict and wrecked vessels. We will work with other levels of government to clean up priority smaller legacy vessels posing risks to our communities.

Adjournment Proceedings

We recognize the threats that abandoned, derelict, and wrecked vessels pose to Canadians and our environment. We are taking a responsible approach to address this very complex issue, and we are doing it in collaboration with our partners and stakeholders. Our government is committed to improving marine safety and responsible shipping, and to protecting Canada's marine environment.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix payroll system started as an ill-conceived Conservative scheme to cut corners and cut costs by replacing complex federal payroll systems with off-the-shelf software from IBM. However, it was the Liberal government that rushed ahead with the implementation of Phoenix despite many warnings of problems and deficiencies with the system. The result is that many thousands of federal employees, delivering important public services across the country, have not been paid the money they have earned.

The question I posed on February 23 was about inaccurate information on T4 tax slips sent to employees who had been incorrectly paid by the Phoenix system. The government has assured us that it is on the verge of correcting those T4s. Therefore, I take the government's word at face value. Rather than questioning whether it will meet that objective, let us wait and see.

I would instead like to use this adjournment debate to update the House on some of the work my constituency office is doing to assist people who have fallen victim of the Phoenix pay system.

Also on February 23, while I was asking a question in the House, my casework assistant in Regina was hosting a conference call of all the caseworkers among NDP MP offices across the country to educate them on how to deal with Phoenix problems and to share best practices between offices. Of course it was through my constituency office that I first became aware of problems with the Phoenix pay system. Employees of the RCMP depot in Regina phoned to complain they were not receiving the pay they had earned.

I know one of the great frustrations experienced by my own casework assistant and by caseworkers in MP offices across the country is that they really do not have the tools to assist people who are not getting paid by Phoenix. One of the constructive proposals they came up with through this conference call on February 23 was to establish an MP phone line, a dedicated line, to the Phoenix pay centre in Miramichi. We have these dedicated lines for employment insurance. We have had them in the past for passports. We have them when we recognize that sometimes people will have problems with federal programs and services and may need their member of Parliament's office to assist them. I would argue that the Phoenix pay system is certainly a large enough problem that a dedicated line would very much be justified in this case. It has been more than a year since Phoenix was implemented and it is still a huge problem.

The deputy minister of Public Services and Procurement came to our committee today and stated that we had now reached the important tipping point where we were starting to process more transactions than we received. Therefore, it may be that the government is finally starting to reduce rather than increase the size of the Phoenix problem. However, if it has taken a year to even get to that tipping point, it suggests that it may take a great deal longer to get to a point where the problem is actually resolved. In the

meantime, it would make a lot of sense to provide a dedicated phone line so MP offices and our staff are able to provide tangible assistance to constituents who have fallen victim to the Phoenix boondoggle.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague. As the member from the National Capital Region representing the riding of Gatineau, I do not have much to add to what my colleague just said. I can only say that we have experienced the same type of situation and the same frustrations over the past year as a result of the implementation of the Phoenix pay system.

[*English*]

I thank my friend for the constructive tone of his questions and his statement tonight. I want to assure him that resolving the ongoing public service pay issue is not only a priority of the government, but a personal priority. I take these issues very seriously.

I know he would want to stand with me and my government in supporting the hundreds of public servants who are working across the country to resolve pay issues.

With tax season upon us, our focus has been to address potential tax implications, particularly as they relate to overpayments. Employees are being reminded to call the Phoenix call centre to ensure that any overpayments are handled as a priority. Employees have been provided access to detailed information online about all payments they received in 2016. This will help them verify whether the taxable earnings stated on their tax slip are correct.

Public Services and Procurement Canada is continuing to make prompt processing of pay requests a key priority. The goal is to process pay requests within established service standards, which for most transactions is 20 days from the time they enter the public service pay centre.

Here is what is being done. As we get to the end of the backlog, and we are thankfully getting to this situation, compensation advisers at the pay centre are being reassigned to deal with new incoming requests. With this realignment of resources, pay requests will be handled more quickly, wait times will get shorter, and late payments will be cleared out. A particular focus is being put on parental and disability leave requests, which I stress our partners in public sector unions have worked with us and have asked that those categories in particular be prioritized.

Technical enhancements to Phoenix also will allow for faster processing of pay transactions. Calculation of acting payments will soon be automated, which we hope will reduce the workload to a great extent. With more resources and increased efficiency at the pay centre, pay transactions are being handled faster.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*Translation*]

We will be more transparent in order to keep employees apprised of progress being made. A new public service pay dashboard will let employees see whether we are meeting service standards and the estimated maximum wait times for different operations.

As always, we continue to work closely with all our partners at the Canada Revenue Agency and the Treasury Board Secretariat. Our government recognizes the serious repercussions that the Phoenix pay problems have had on the lives of public service employees and workers.

As I mentioned, we are making progress toward solving current problems and avoiding future ones.

● (1840)

[*English*]

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear the government is working on this, although it has been very disappointing that the government rushed ahead with implementing Phoenix when there were all kinds of indications these types of problems would manifest themselves.

It has now been more than a year since that implementation was done and we are only just at the point where perhaps the government is starting to reduce the size of the problem rather than allowing it to increase. We are hopeful progress can be made, but we are also disappointed about the lack of progress up until quite recently.

Another constructive proposal that came out of this conference call of casework assistants among New Democratic MP offices was

that the government should not put pensions under the Phoenix pay system. I wonder if during his final minute, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement could commit to the House that the government is not going to put public service pensions through the Phoenix payroll system, which has proven to be so problematic for normal and other types of pay and benefits.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I will take what the member suggests under advisement. The IT transformation project, Phoenix, is a complex one. I stress it was compounded by the fact that we inherited a situation where all the compensation advisers, 700 of them, had been let go by the previous government. The accounting savings had been booked. This was an IT implementation that was botched long before we were able to commence the implementation.

Right now we are focused on fixing this situation. We will fix it. We are applying all the resources we can to be responsive to public servants, to solve individual cases, and to do the kind of work to free them up to do the great work they do for Canadians. I know the hon. member would join me in standing with them as they work their way through these problems, of which I know we will get to the end.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

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