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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 16, 2014
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 16, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2013-14 annual reports on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act from the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

[*English*]

These documents are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association respecting its participation at the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings, held in Normandy, France, from June 5 to 7, 2014.

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PETITIONS

CANADA POST

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed over the summer by several hundred of my constituents. The petition is about cuts at Canada Post and their impact on our seniors, people with reduced mobility and businesses. It is a follow-up to public consultations held in Chambly with my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should reinstate the federal minimum wage and increase it incrementally to \$15 per hour over five years.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will have the genuine honour of sharing my time with my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I would also like to say hello to all of the British Columbians who have woken up to listen to this memorable speech.

I am honoured to rise in the House as the first to speak in favour of raising the federal minimum wage. Actually, we are talking about restoring the federal minimum wage, which, sadly, was abolished by the Liberals in 1996. That was one of the factors that led to increasing inequality in Canada and Quebec over the past 20 years.

There is currently no federal minimum wage. All we have is a mechanism to ensure that people working in federally regulated jobs get paid the provincial minimum wage, which is now between \$9 and \$11 per hour. The highest minimum wage is in Ontario.

This explains the absurd and tragic situation we find ourselves in, where some Canadians can get up every morning and work 40 hours a week, yet still live below the poverty line. This is unbelievable and unacceptable in a society as rich as ours, in a G7 country. For people to have to work full time and still live below the poverty line is an affront to human dignity and to the efforts made by these men and women every day in going to work.

Business of Supply

We in the NDP have come up with this concrete proposal to help people get out of poverty and ensure that no one who works full time ever has to live in poverty or be forced to go to a food bank to put food on the table. Under the Liberals and Conservatives, the number of people forced to turn to food banks to put food on the table has skyrocketed.

The unemployed are not the only ones turning to social assistance; people who work are also doing so. In fact, working full time no longer automatically means being able to feed your family and your children. We have people in Canada who work and still go without food themselves in order to feed their children so they do not go to school in the morning on an empty stomach.

There are pockets of poverty in some areas of our cities and towns that need to be addressed. Those people deserve our help.

• (1005)

[English]

We are seeing, in the last couple of years in Canada, a downward spiral of wages and revenues. We in the NDP believe that we should lift up everybody, lift up our communities and make better lives for everybody in Canada.

[Translation]

We have to put an end to the continuing downward spiral of people's purchasing power and salaries. The Conservative government has pushed hard to reduce the salaries and incomes of Canadians and Quebecers.

Consider the temporary foreign worker program, which allows employers to import cheap labour year after year. Under the Conservatives, the number of temporary foreign workers has increased from some 100,000 per year to approximately 400,000. These people are working at Tim Hortons and McDonald's.

Then there are the cuts to employment insurance. People are being forced to accept lower and lower salaries, perhaps 90% or 80% of their former salary. According to the Conservatives, if people have received too much help from this program, they must accept 70% of their former salary. We feel that is unacceptable.

The measure we are proposing today is reasonable. The majority of studies demonstrate that a gradual, reasonable and moderate increase in the minimum wage would not result in job losses. The studies and documentation are clear on this. It will help the fight against inequality but will not adversely impact job creation. This course of action is fully justified.

Of course, it will be said that this will affect only federally regulated employees. There are nearly 820,000 federally regulated workers in the private sector, and approximately 100,000 of them earn less than \$15 an hour.

This measure will therefore provide tangible help to 100,000 families in Canada. That is not insignificant. It will have a considerable impact on our communities. It will set the bar and send a message to the provinces that they must increase their minimum wages and follow the federal government's lead so that workers can live in dignity.

That is very important to us. A total of 80% of the poorest Canadians have seen their incomes stagnate. Take away the richest 20%, and the remaining 80% of the poorest Canadians have seen their incomes stagnate over the past 35 years. If we compare the average minimum wages from 1975 and 2013, there was a 1¢ real increase in the average minimum wage, and that is in constant dollars, not current dollars. We find that unacceptable. We need to take action to correct the situation.

One thing is not well known: Canada is perceived as having a more egalitarian society than our neighbours to the south, the Americans, who live in a society fraught with rampant, unbridled capitalism. In Canada we are proud of our social safety net. Our system is different from the American system. We have a public health system—which was created by the NDP, and we are very proud of it—that means there is less inequality in Canada than in the United States. However, we are noticing that the gap is now growing faster here than in the United States.

An hon. member: That is a fact.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is a fact and it is alarming. We also have a government that just does not care.

There is something called the Gini coefficient. I am going to seem smart, but I only learned about it two years ago. It is a number between 0 and 1. If everyone in Canada has the same income, the Gini coefficient is 0. If someone has all the wealth in Canada, the Gini coefficient is 1. For the first time, the Gini coefficient in Canada is greater than 0.3. We have reached 0.32. At 0.4 we become a society where there is great inequality. We are headed in that direction very quickly. Never before in Canada's history have we had a Gini coefficient greater than 0.3. Thanks to the Conservatives, we can say that we have now achieved that not very commendable objective.

We believe that we must turn things around. We have to reverse the trend because it is not acceptable for the richest people in our society to continue getting richer while others watch as their income stagnates or decreases.

A study by the Broadbent Institute indicates that since 1999, the top 10% of wealthiest Canadians have accounted for half the wealth in our country. The top 10% own half of all the wealth in Canada. The bottom 50% control less than 6% of the wealth in Canada. This creates dangerous situations. It is not good for the social climate. This creates social tension and problems because people are being left behind. We are failing some people in our society as though they no longer count. It is as though all the policies were written so that the top 1% or 10% can get richer. It is as though the government does not care about the middle class or the least fortunate in our society.

The NDP has a different vision. It is a vision of social justice, progress and sharing wealth so that everyone here in Canada can live in dignity. Reinstating the federal minimum wage and increasing it incrementally to \$15 per hour over five years is a start. It is what the NDP is proposing. We are extremely proud of that. I invite all my House of Commons colleagues in the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party to support this NDP motion.

Business of Supply

•(1010)

[English]

That way, finally, in Canada, no one is left behind and everybody can live in dignity.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are certainly a number of concerns and flaws in the argument put forward by my hon. colleague.

He talks about how many families this would impact. To be quite frank, the federally regulated workforce is what it will impact, and by most recent estimates, 0.05% of it or 416 people earn minimum wage. Compared to 35 million people in the country of Canada, this would not have nearly the impact that he is putting forward. I would challenge him in terms of how much impact this would actually have.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, let me see if I understand my colleague correctly. She is saying that if there are no consequences for millions of people, then the government does not care and it is not worth the effort. Let those people remain in poverty. Let them earn a minimum wage that does not allow them to pay the rent, go on vacation or buy clothes for their children. It is no big deal.

Ultimately, if she said that this affects only 50 people, I would still want to help them.

Are my arguments really so flawed? I think instead that the Conservatives across the way lack compassion.

•(1015)

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are tasked with here today is to get to the essence of it.

My colleague made a number of comments that I fully agree with. There is a gap growing between the haves and the have-nots. I also agree that the government is more focused on the haves and the have-mores.

The parliamentary secretary posed an absolutely legitimate question. The answer was “can they not be compassionate?”

According to the 2008 Stats Can report, this would impact fewer than 500 Canadians. Could the member speak to that, if in fact those are the numbers the NDP is working with?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I accept my colleague's question. It is a legitimate one.

I simply want to remind the member that 94% of the income inequality among Canadians over the last 35 years occurred when Liberal governments were in power. The member should be careful about making implications.

If the member is looking at 2008 figures, he is behind. If he is looking at a lower minimum wage—less than \$12 an hour—then we are not comparing the same things.

We are talking numbers today, and we are talking about a \$15 minimum wage. Nearly 100,000 workers would be covered and affected by a decision of this kind made by the federal government. My colleague's figures are unfortunately outdated.

We are setting the bar at \$15 an hour. This would ensure that tens of thousands of federally regulated employees would see an increased standard of living.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to enter into this debate. I will mention that I was in Vancouver when our leader made the announcement on this particular aspect of our policy going forward.

I had an interesting conversation with a fellow who works at the Vancouver airport, under the wing, taking care of the business we all rely on: moving our baggage, ensuring that the planes come into the docks in a correct fashion, making sure that no damage occurs to these planes that we fly on, and making sure that everything is taken care of. He was earning \$10 an hour in that very regulated area.

It is simply unacceptable that today someone in that type of responsible position earns \$10 an hour. No one can live in Vancouver, in a decent fashion, on \$10 an hour. That is an extremely expensive place. Let us think about that worker having to make his way to the Vancouver airport, probably from some outlying district like Surrey, to work, to serve the people of Canada in a good, responsible, safe fashion doing extraordinary work.

This is not acceptable. Does the member agree?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I totally agree with my colleague. This is a very important point. People cannot make a living or have a family living in Canada on \$10 an hour. It is completely irresponsible. An increased minimum wage will help those workers, especially young workers, women, and immigrants in our country. This is a very important measure the NDP proposes today.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. That is as close as my French will come. He has made some excellent points we need to really consider.

My friend from the north just asked a question about people working at airlines. Imagine earning \$10 an hour, having four children at home, being the sole provider, working in a technical job that requires one's complete attention, and sitting there worrying about how to pay the bills at the end of the month. It strikes me as so sad that people from the other side cannot seem to see this. Even if it was solely 400 people, if this was improving their lives, why in the world would they not want to improve their lives? It does not make sense.

I will repeat a phrase my friend used: New Democrats believe Canadians who work hard and play by the rules should be able to make a decent living. Since the 1980s, I have watched the income disparity grow in this country. It got worse in 1996, when our friends down here in the Liberal Party cut out the federal minimum wage.

Business of Supply

It is about leadership at the federal level, not about dollars and cents. Coming back to my friend's proposition, if the federal government takes the lead in increasing the minimum wage, then it is guidance for the provinces to do the same.

You might have noticed during your speech that I was writing around the corners of my speech. I tend to do that, because you prompted some good ideas—

• (1020)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. This is the second time this has happened this morning. The comments should be directed to the Chair, not to other members of the chamber.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I am so in the habit of talking to my good friend here. Thank you for the guidance. I appreciate it.

The other thing is that people who are working for \$10 an hour are not getting benefits, so they have other things they are paying for over and above. It is so disgusting to think about where we are leading Canadians. This should be a country of equals, at least to the point of living in dignity.

Over the summer I heard from Canadians, as I am sure others did, who said that they are not earning enough, that the country has been turned upside down. I am sure that they would agree with an increase in the minimum wage federally and across the board. I can assure the House, and Canadian workers who might be listening today, that the next federal government, an NDP government, will make this happen.

I would add again that our friends, the Liberals, most assuredly erred when they cancelled the federal minimum wage. Now it is up to the NDP to start to undo the damage that was started with the Liberal Party.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You guys voted for it.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, it is a well-understood economic fact that improving the minimum wage is a key step in reducing income inequality and building a fair economy.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: You voted for it.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I hear noise from the Liberal side of the House. I guess they cannot get enough attention these days.

Over the summer, we saw fast food workers protesting across the United States. That is an example Canadian workers could follow. It is a shame that workers have to go to that extent to just get a decent wage. Tens of thousands of low-wage American workers took to the streets with strikes and rallies. I was going to say it was to push for higher salaries but I should really say that it was for at least fair salaries. Organizations like the Service Employees International Union called on the U.S. government to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15. It did so because it is even worse in the U.S. The U.S. minimum wage is currently \$7.25 an hour. Think about that. How far will that get someone? How far will it take a family?

Income inequality around the world has started to generate a similar debate in other countries. It has actually led to some governments making change. Germany introduced its first minimum wage. It is slated to start in 2015. German companies are the

economic powerhouse, really, of the world today, especially in Europe.

In Switzerland, people are asking that a Swiss adult earn a basic income. Members will recall that NDP policy for years talked about a guaranteed annual income. In Switzerland it works out to \$2,800 on a monthly basis. Compare that to \$10 an hour and we would understand how much more people could do for their families if they had that.

Australia has one of the highest minimum wages in the world at \$17.45 an hour. People who are under 18 years of age earn somewhat less than that.

New Democrats, along with workers across Canada, believe that federal workers in Canada should have their own minimum wage. The Liberals, when in government, removed the federal minimum wage, as we have said repeatedly. Hopefully they have seen the error of that decision and will support the motion here today, although with the noise we hear from that end it is hard to decide which way they are going on this.

Experts believe that Canada's income inequality is at an all-time high, with approximately three million Canadians living below the low-income cut-off. There about one million Canadians earning minimum wage, 28% of whom are over the age of 35. They build their lives and into their 40s or 50s are still earning that. Also, 3.8 million workers in the U.S. earn wages at or below the federal minimum. What we are seeing in North America is a trend to drive workers' wages low or to keep them low.

• (1025)

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has in the past suggested that Ontario's minimum wage drags people into poverty. In fairness to the Government of Ontario, it just made a modest increase to \$11 an hour, but the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has suggested that should have been \$14.50 an hour in order to even begin to address poverty.

Our friends on the other side have an opportunity to reinstate a federal minimum wage. Our suggestion is to do it incrementally, to achieve it by 2015. They have the opportunity to do this, so why wait for an NDP government? Why not do it now?

The Conservatives have their views about law and order and people doing things right and following the rules. Canadians have followed the rules and they continue to do so, but when the rules hold them back in the manner that this does, we have to shake our heads. We have to ask why in the world the federal government would not institute at least a reasonable minimum wage of \$15 an hour. What possible justification does it have for not doing that?

Business of Supply

Commerce tells us that if the minimum wage is increased and people are given more disposable income they will spend it, which causes the economy to grow. The rest of us may have to pay a bit more in order to ensure that our fellow citizens live in dignity, but I am sure that if members on the other side stop to really consider that, they would be prepared to do that. They are not totally unreasonable people, although at times I wonder.

More than 94% of the increase in income inequity over the past 35 years occurred under the Liberal government. The reality is that statistics do not matter. What matters is what is happening in people's lives. We can argue statistics, and we heard that from the government side when it asked how many people this would affect. The government's figure is extremely low and some may find ours a bit high.

The reality is that some Canadians are living in poverty, unable to raise their children, unable to get their children educated in university or anywhere else. They have no chance in life to move ahead and they are looking to the federal government to give them a decent wage and \$15 would just be the beginning. More has to be done for Canadians.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I hope to have the opportunity to correct some of the misinformation out there in terms of the living wage.

We heard about 1996, when we moved away from aligning with the provincial standard, and I understand the NDP supported that at that time. Those members seem to have had a significant shift in terms of their philosophy.

Many experts in this area are saying the provinces are in the best position. Obviously, it is much more expensive to live in Vancouver, British Columbia, than it is in some other communities. Some experts are saying we should have more microcosms in terms of minimum wage and that the provinces should be looking within themselves with respect to smaller numbers.

I find it a little strange that the NDP would look at the federal government minimum wage and suggest that everyone should go in that direction, when really it was agreed to be moved to the provincial level. A lot of experts recognize the different issues in communities throughout the country and we need to be sensitive to those issues.

• (1030)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. The NDP did support that motion at the time and we did it—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wayne Marston: Excuse me. I am getting tired of that, Mr. Speaker. Every time we speak those members interrupt.

The reason we chose to support the motion was because the Liberals had held it back for so long that by cancelling it and moving it to the provinces, the provinces were actually ahead of us. That is why we did that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the official opposition for putting forward a motion that

allows us to review the question of the minimum wage for federal workers.

I have two questions. First, I would like clarification as to whether the NDP motion intends to extend a \$15 an hour minimum wage to all classes of workers who are under federal jurisdiction, which would include rail workers, airline personnel, and so on, or just those workers directly employed, which I understand would be a small number.

Second, in putting the motion forward has the NDP considered whether this is the most strategic place to put pressure on the provinces to raise the minimum wage, or whether the labour skewing effects of the temporary foreign worker program in depressing wages might have had a larger impact on skewing the wages currently being paid across Canada?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, since the member is getting a two for one today, I would be glad to answer.

Yes, it would be intended for all in the federal jurisdiction. Considering the question around the temporary foreign workers, they are not mutually exclusive. There is the fact that the temporary foreign worker program has succeeded in driving down wages in Canada. We should be addressing that as a separate issue, but of course the \$15 is directed at Canadians. The temporary foreign workers are allowed to be paid 15% lower than Canadian wages, so that is an even worse distortion. I thank the member for the question.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. I largely agree with most of the sentiments he expressed therein, but it is hard to vote and to debate rationally without some facts on the table.

The first question I would have is this. Has he or has his party done a study on the inflationary effects, or not, of his proposal?

Second, has the member considered what potential job losses may accrue, or not, as the case may be, by virtue of raising the minimum wage rate?

Third, has he considered the effect on unpaid internships, whether in fact those people who are possibly laid off by virtue of \$15 an hour now get turned into unpaid internships?

Fourth, has he considered the regional distribution? There is a hot labour market in Alberta and in a lot of other places there is not.

I would be interested in his thoughts on any one or all of the above in 15 seconds or less.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, my response is that it was a very nice speech from the member.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked the House to agree to increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Let me begin by asking this. Is this really the best way to help low-income Canadians?

There are a number of reasons why the government does not support the motion and I welcome the opportunity to set some of them out.

Business of Supply

At first glance, the motion may seem like a great idea, but as we look at it very carefully, we see that it actually is not. As I am sure the hon. member knows, the minimum wage applicable to employees who are in the federally regulated industries is the same as the minimum wage in the provinces where the individuals are usually employed. This is because for years now the Canada Labour Code has set minimum wages to replicate those of the provinces, provincial labour markets having an idea of where wages should be focused. This has been the case since 1996.

We know that we need to focus on some important tasks. Those are tasks like creating jobs, balancing our budget, helping seniors and people with disabilities, supporting skills training, and generally establishing the conditions to ensure that Canada's long-term prosperity is reached. However, for some reason we are obliged to debate federal minimum wages today.

• (1035)

[Translation]

Let us look at the actual situation.

[English]

First, according to the federal jurisdiction workplace survey, only 416 federally regulated employees were earning just the minimum wage in 2008. Let me put this in perspective. These people represent 0.05% of all the employees in the federal jurisdiction, and that was in 2008. I wonder if this is actually what we should be using our debate time for. After all, the vast majority of federally regulated employees have higher-income jobs. Why are we spending an entire day talking about this wage rate, which the provinces have been focused on in their direct labour markets? There is nothing unusual or unfair about federal minimum wage rates.

[Translation]

For nearly 20 years, the federal minimum wage has varied, in accordance with the provincial minimum wage.

[English]

In fact, for nearly the last two decades the federal minimum wage has moved in lockstep with the applicable provincial minimum wages. It is still the best way to set the federal minimum wage. Let us keep in mind that labour markets vary across the country. We have a very large country, and thus we see variability. Our government believes that the provinces and territories are best placed to assess and respond to the needs in their local labour markets.

[Translation]

The provinces and territories are free to establish an appropriate minimum wage that takes their economic situation into account.

[English]

Some people have expressed concerns that some provinces are slow to adjust their minimum wage rates to match inflation and increase the average wages, but that is simply not true. Let us look at the facts.

Provincial minimum wage rates have evolved rapidly in recent years to reflect changing labour market conditions. The existing system is fair and well adapted to provincial needs when it comes to

labour market assessments. Provincial governments carefully analyze the labour markets and their economic conditions before they make adjustments to their minimum wage rates. Several provinces have legislation stipulating that their minimum wage rates must be reviewed on a yearly or bi-yearly basis. Even those that do not have legislative requirements tend to adjust their minimum wage rates regularly.

Another point is that the motion asks us to make a significant change without appropriate reflection on what the effects might be on the job markets.

[Translation]

For example, it would make sense to look at the effects such a change would have on small businesses.

[English]

The current system is fair. It ensures that employees under federal jurisdiction are never paid less than their provincial counterparts. The way that we help low-income Canadians is not by hiking the minimum wage, but by bringing in measures that foster a strong economy and the creation of well-paying jobs. Economic growth and job creation are priorities of this government and we are leading the way in the G7, doing much more and, in that regard, focusing and making sure that we are ahead of our trading partners.

Since the economic downturn we have had a steady increase in employment, low interest rates, and the kind of economic growth that makes us the envy of the world. We believe that getting the economic essentials rights will keep us on the right track for greater levels of prosperity.

For example, the Minister of Finance recently announced the small business job credit that will lower EI premiums for small businesses by 15%. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that the credit will create 25,000 person-years of employment over the next two to three years. The minister also confirmed that in 2017, EI premiums will be cut from the current \$1.88 per \$100 of earnings to \$1.47. Employers will have more money to invest in training and increased wages, and workers will have more money in their wallets at the end of the day so they can afford things like hockey and other items their families would like them to invest in.

• (1040)

[Translation]

It is clear that we are on the right track.

[English]

Evidence alone is that more than 1.1 million jobs have been created since July 2009 and more than 80% of these jobs have been full-time positions. The vast majority of these jobs are in the private sector in high-wage industries and Canada is currently the only country in the world with tariff-free access to the American market. This represents over 300 million individuals.

Business of Supply

We have also signed an agreement in principle with the European Union that will give us access to markets of over 500 million people. What about our recent free trade agreement in principle with South Korea, which again opens up additional Asian markets to Canadian products? It is another significant market for Canadian firms.

We have also had a series of major resource projects on our economic agenda that will ensure Canada's prosperity for the next decade. At the same time, the government will continue to take concrete steps to support Canadian workers at all income levels and that means, for example, making sure that workers in the federal jurisdiction have healthy and safe work environments. Since our government was elected we have increased occupational health and safety protections for employees in federally regulated industries.

It means making sure that we have equal opportunities for hiring and for advancement. It means investing in preventive mediation to help workplace parties resolve their differences and create collective agreements that benefit both workers and employers. It also means implementing the wage earner protection program, which protects the wages, vacation pay, severance pay and termination owed to workers who lose their jobs when their employers go bankrupt or into receivership.

[*Translation*]

We all know that Canadian workers often experience significant challenges when their employers go bankrupt.

[*English*]

It is hard enough to lose a job for reasons beyond our control, but it is quite unfair to be deprived of wages that were worked for and that were counted on. It is especially distressing when we see other creditors being paid off first. That is why, in the interests in fairness, we brought in the wage earner protection program, which makes the payment of wages owed to workers in this situation a superpriority.

What does the program do and how does it work? The trustee or receiver assigned to manage the bankruptcy or receivership is required to provide information to the workers on any amounts that they are owed. Workers can then file a proof of claim with the trustee or receiver, and the next step is to submit the application for payment to Service Canada.

The eligibility period starts six months before restructuring and ends on the day of bankruptcy or receivership. Under the rules of the program, these workers can receive an amount equal to four weeks of maximum insurable earnings as defined by the Employment Insurance Act.

The government has expanded the WEPP twice. It was expanded in 2009 to include unpaid termination and severance pay as eligible wages and in 2011 to improve coverage under the program in cases where the employer undergoes restructuring before going bankrupt or entering receivership. Workers in this situation can apply, as I said before, to Service Canada online. If they have all of the relevant information, they can usually get their payments within a few weeks.

The WEPP was established in July 2008. Between that date and July 31, 2014, more than 74,000 Canadians received payments that total \$174.8 million, with an average WEPP payment to a worker for wages owed by employers who are bankrupt or subject to

receivership of just over \$2,500. This is a very successful and needed program, and for this fiscal year, our government has budgeted just over \$49 million for it.

We have also amended the Canada Labour Code to ensure that employees who lose their jobs cannot be deprived of severance just because they happen to be entitled to a pension.

That is not all. We have also adopted the Helping Families in Need Act, which gives federally regulated employees the right to take unpaid leave in special circumstances. It allows for up to 37 weeks of leave for an employee whose child under the age of 18 is critically ill.

I can tell members from personal experience that this is something that families need. Having been a physician, I have witnessed situations in which a parent was unable to be at a child's bedside to make sure that care was managed appropriately. As a physician, I know that having a parent there to help organize care for the child and provide emotional support for the child and the family is essential, and we moved forward with this measure last year.

The act also provides up to 104 weeks of leave for an employee whose child has died because of a probable Criminal Code offence. It also offers up to 52 weeks of leave for an employee whose child is missing as a result of a crime. Canadians who take these leaves can now count on benefits through the federal income support for parents of murdered or missing children grant, as well as the employment insurance program.

We extended the duration of sick leave to 17 weeks. This gives a lot more flexibility to parents who must, for various reasons, put an end to their maternity or paternity leave.

● (1045)

This government is supporting Canadian families in many ways. Most significantly among them, Canadian families have seen an increase of about 10% of their real after-tax incomes under our administration. For a family of four, on average we are putting over \$3,400 back in their pockets so that they can make decisions on where they would like to invest it in the things that matter to them, whether it is a family vacation or making sure that their child can attend hockey or ballet.

These are just some of the host of reasonable and well-thought-out measures that the government is taking every day to support and protect workers in our country. However, if we want to continue improving the standard of living of Canadian families, we need to continue acting responsibly. The motion before us is political grandstanding by the NDP.

Business of Supply

Our Conservative government is proud of the initiatives that it has brought forward to lower taxes and put more money in the pockets of hard-working families. With sound fiscal policy, we worked hand in glove with employers, employees, and the provinces. Reckless changes to the Canada Labour Code create disruption, as has been very clearly outlined by many of our stakeholders.

We know that the Canada Labour Code is something that everyone respects. I would encourage the opposition not to focus on making reckless changes to sound fiscal policy but to focus on what matters, which is making sure that Canadians have opportunities for great jobs.

While it is important that workers earn decent wages and while the sponsor of the motion may have good intentions, I hope that my hon. colleague will recognize that the proposal as it reads simply cannot be supported.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is pathetic that the government is giving tax credits to people who do not earn enough to pay taxes. It does not change a thing in their lives.

I have two questions.

First, is the number of women in Canada who are working full time, yet living under the poverty line, acceptable to the Conservative government?

The second question is this. The government's own federal labour standards review recommended in 2006 that the federal government reinstate the federal minimum wage and benchmark it to Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off. Does the minister agree with her own federal labour standards review?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my comments, I think it is very clear that the provincial labour ministers and provincial governments know their provincial labour markets. The system, as it is right now and as it has been for almost two decades, creates opportunities whereby Canadians in the provinces where they work are treated fairly and the same.

I think it is also important to outline to the members here that the number of Canadians living below the low-income cut-off is actually at its lowest level ever because of this government. Why is that? It is because we are creating jobs. We are providing opportunities for Canadians. We are making sure that Canadians have pride in their work and are also in high-income jobs, many of which are in the private sector.

When Canadians have jobs, they are proud of themselves, but they also invest in their families. I would encourage the member opposite to focus on supporting the initiatives through which this government is moving forward in creating jobs—in fact, we have created 1.1 million of them since the downturn of the recession—as opposed to opposing every single measure we have taken in our recent budgets to make sure Canadians can be employed. The member should step up to that.

We should not be focused on small issues that we know affect a very small subset of Canadians. We need to make sure that every Canadian has a high-paying job that provides great opportunities for

families. That is what this government is focused on: making sure Canadians are employed in well-paid jobs.

• (1050)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree somewhat with the minister that we are trying to vet out how many people this measure would affect and what impact it would have, but as we go forward in the debate today, we have an opportunity to ask a question.

She made reference to the government being seized on developing high-paying jobs. The reality is that under the government, the number of Canadians who are working for minimum wage has increased by 66%. We now have one million Canadians who are working for minimum wage in this country.

I ask her, as Minister of Labour, what are the signs? Why is this happening? Why has the number of Canadians in this situation increased by 66%? Why has this number grown so egregiously under the reign of this government?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying that is categorically false. Of the jobs that have been created since 2009, as a mentioned before, over 1.1 million, 80% of them, are in the private sector and over 65% of them are well-paying jobs.

Those jobs have been created by Canadian industry because we have created the opportunity, the stimulus, for job creation in Canada. Whether that be through free trade agreements and increasing opportunities for Canadians to export abroad, whether that be by making sure that Canadians are well skilled, whether that be through the Canada job grant or through internship programs for literally thousands of young Canadians or through the Canada summer jobs program that provides essential opportunities for skills for those young Canadians to move to their next step in employment, these are new things we have been focused on to create good, well-paying jobs for Canadians so that they can move forward.

I think the member opposite would agree that the provinces are in the best position to make decisions with respect to their local labour markets. That is why the minimum wage in the Canada Labour Code is actually set to match those, province by province.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister very articulately spoke to the provinces being in the best position to set the minimum wage guidelines. Today we are debating a motion that seems somewhat arbitrary. It seems as though the NDP has picked a number and moved forward with it.

I wonder if she could talk a bit more about the provinces and the fact that they have an ongoing process, which she alluded to in her remarks. It is important to understand why the provinces are ideally suited to actually determine minimum wage.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question. The parliamentary secretary is doing outstanding work, both in the area where she supports me, labour, and also in western diversification.

As I mentioned before, the provincial labour ministers and markets are seeing the reflection of what is changing on the ground. Canada is an enormous country, the second-largest land mass in the world. I do not think everyone in British Columbia has the same types of occupations as those in the maritime provinces, and that is actually a strength of our country. Because of that, having provincial labour markets determine their minimum wage and the direction of their local labour markets is essential.

That is why, in 1996, the minimum wage that was set in the Canada Labour Code was changed in order to marry what was happening in the provinces, and so that Canadian neighbours understood that their wage rates were the same. We want fairness and equity and in such an enormous country, and making sure that happens on a province-by-province basis is extremely important.

Therefore, I would encourage the member opposite to consider that. We want Canadians to be treated fairly and equitably. That is exactly what the Canada Labour Code reflects right now, and that is why it was changed in 1996.

•(1055)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am flabbergasted by the reasons that government representatives are giving us.

They are telling us that the provinces are in a better position to set the minimum wage. The provinces are doing a good job, but this is a chance for us to make things even better.

Could my colleague opposite tell us why the government did not negotiate as equals with the provinces on health transfers if the provinces have sole jurisdiction over health care services and they know very well what to do?

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, going hand in glove and in a fashion similar to how we are being respectful of the provinces, health transfers currently are on an escalator of 6% per year, and that will be transferred over to GDP. However, the decisions on health care remain in the hands of the provinces. They understand exactly what their patients need.

Having been a physician in the province of Ontario and having worked at several hospitals at various times, I can say that the chief of surgery or the CEO probably had a better sense of what the health care needs were in the local community than someone here in the House. That is why the transfer payments escalate. It is to support the provinces in what they are doing. Hopefully the provinces are innovating to make sure they provide the best care possible.

Hence, we have the same analogy in the Canada Labour Code. It is matching what is going on in the provinces, because the provinces have a good sense of exactly what is happening in their local labour markets.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the minister was speaking of the equitable treatment of Canadians. With reference to the transfers to provinces, ever since the cuts made to defeat the deficit in the early 1990s, the cuts in transfers have led to less money for education, which has meant fewer available school

grounds and fewer easily organizable events that are accessible to all kids.

While the member talks about boutique tax cuts to enable kids to go to ballet and hockey, would she not agree that it would be much better to ensure recreation is accessible to children whose parents are not earning enough money to pay taxes or to enter into somewhat more expensive sports? We need to make play available to all kids, regardless of their parents' incomes.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, first, to set the record straight, the social transfer is also on an escalator and has been for several years. It was established by one of Hon. Jim Flaherty's budgets.

I want to be very clear that this social transfer continues, it is on an escalator and it will meet GDP as well.

One of the most substantive investments this government has made, and I am very proud of it, is the RInC fund. It made a huge impact in many local communities in ensuring that local recreational infrastructure was upgraded or created so young families could participate in as many activities as possible across the country. It has been overwhelmingly successful. Communities across the country are seeing improvements in infrastructure.

I am proud of our record on infrastructure. I am proud that we are moving forward with transfers to the provinces so they can invest, whether that be in social services or education. Obviously it is their choice how they allocate it.

I am looking forward to seeing as many kids as possible in my riding heading out to the rink so they can play hockey in Thornton. We invested in the hockey arena, ensuring it had the best roof ever. Now they do not have the challenges faced with the snow inside the arena while playing hockey.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy 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)

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Business of Supply

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg North. We are trying to get him on his feet early in the session today. He is a little nervous, but with the support of his colleagues and the entire chamber, maybe we will get him up to say a few words.

As I said in my question for the minister, this debate gives us the opportunity to speak to the broader question, which is the continued growth in the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Since the Conservatives have taken over, we have seen a 66% increase in the number of Canadians who work for minimum wage. One million Canadians now work for minimum wage.

This should be of great concern to all of us. The quality of life for Canadians who go to work day in day out for the entire year and still live close to the poverty line should be of great concern to us as legislators, as members of Parliament.

To speak specifically about the motion brought forward by the NDP today, when we boil down the numbers, it does not really represent or impact a great number of people. It is more symbolic than substantive, and I would like to make a couple of comments around that.

According to the 2010 Statistics Canada survey of employees in federal jurisdictions, there are about 820,000 federal employees out of the 17 million who work in our country. According to that study, just 416 employees within federal jurisdiction earn the legal minimum wage, with 44% of these employees in companies with 100 or more employees. With 416 Canadians out of a workforce of 17 million, when we put that in perspective, again, the motion is a symbolic gesture more so than substantive.

I think we could engage in a debate that would impact more Canadians, because a number of Canadians continue to struggle from day to day, from paycheque to paycheque. This is a reality in a lot of kitchens across the country.

There was an all-committee study both in the House of Commons and the Senate. When we look at the recommendations those committees put forward on how to deal with and address poverty, some of them would have impacted a far greater number of Canadians, and probably would have helped a greater number of Canadians and Canadian families.

We should be looking at why the government has not been able to invest in developing the high-quality jobs and training opportunities, and why we continue to see that increase of people working in low-wage, precarious jobs.

After being home all summer, and I am sure many of the members in the House here would have heard the same story, I heard from seniors and those getting close to their senior years. They had seen the change in the OAS. Those who have worked their entire life in low-wage precarious jobs see the increase in the eligibility age for OAS from 65 to 67 as significant.

• (1100)

The opportunity to expand the reach and benefit of the levels of the working income tax benefit would go a far greater distance in helping a greater number of people. However, I see this as somewhat

of a symbolic gesture. There has to be some type of balance in policy that upholds a societal benefit.

I agree that we need some kind of balance. I thought the proposal that was put forward by our leader yesterday on the hiring benefit that would allow us \$1,280 for every hire, which for \$225 million could produce 176,000 new jobs, would benefit business and Canadian workers. Those are more substantive issues that could be brought forward and could have a greater impact.

What we try to strive for, certainly within our party, is balance in labour relations. I do not think there has been any government in the history of the country that has thrown the balance between labour and management out of whack more so than the current government, from the excessive use of back to work legislation through changes to the Canada Labour Code. Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 are pretty much outright attacks on organized labour. One of the keys to balancing labour relations is to have a fair process both by labour and management to have an opportunity to work out issues. For over 30 years, a tripartite approach has been in place.

In 2004, when we were still in government, the Liberal government used such a process for the review of part III of the Canada Labour Code undertaken by Harry Arthurs. His consultation process included direct input from labour and management representatives, cross-country public meetings, hearing from 171 different presentations and 154 formal briefings. He talked with management, with organized labour and community-based organizations. He talked to labour standard administrators and practitioners. That process resulted in Mr. Arthurs making a number of recommendations that maybe everyone might not have agreed on but at least they respected a balanced process.

One such recommendation, and the one that we are talking about today, was the reinstatement of the federal minimum wage rate. On the basis of his consultations with all stakeholders and the research, Mr. Arthurs believed that a federal minimum wage was justified. He captured the essence of a federal minimum wage in this comment, which I will read into the record. He stated:

—the argument over a national minimum wage is not about politics or economics. It is about decency. Just as we reject most forms of child labour on ethical grounds, whatever their economic attractions, we recoil from the notion that in an affluent society like ours good, hard-working people should have to live in abject poverty.

This motion deals only with federal workers and workers in federal industries. Therefore, those who are watching at home should know that this does not apply to those who work in the service industry flipping burgers or making beds, those in one of the million minimum wage jobs in our country. This applies to a very specific sector. Let us ensure that we temper the excitement and expectation for this motion with respect to an increase in the minimum wage.

What Mr. Arthurs said in his comments stand true. Under the work that he has done and put forward, this motion, although humble, is worthwhile supporting.

Business of Supply

• (1105)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to note that I had the great privilege of doing some travelling this summer. I was in Cape Breton, a beautiful area of the country, and Vancouver, of course another beautiful area of the country.

However, what became very clear to me is that in every province the living conditions are very different in terms of the cost of living, the cost of housing and how the businesses are actually doing, and within each province there are even microcosms of communities. Clearly the provinces are in a very good position, so I find it strange how the Liberals would support this motion, when really aligning the federal government workers with the provincial rate is a very sensible and important thing to do. Is the member telling us that the provinces are not in a good position to pick minimum wages for employees?

• (1110)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, first I want to recognize that my friend and colleague did send me a note when she was in my riding. I thought that was very kind and gracious of her. I know she had an opportunity to golf on one of the greatest courses in this country, Cabot Links. Out of respect for my colleague, I will not let it be known what she scored.

As modest as this motion is—and it does have impact—this would just impact on those who work in federally regulated industries. When we look at those particular industries, we see they are probably some of the bigger industries. They are for the most part highly unionized. We are not talking about entry-level jobs. We are talking about employees who come with specific skill sets. When we weigh that in and we look at the work Mr. Arthurs has done on this particular issue and we look at the process he pursued, I am very comfortable in supporting his recommendation, that being the reinstatement of a federal minimum wage.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to get into this federal-provincial argument a bit here. What is happening in this country is that there is a race to the bottom. Businesses pick up on that. They move to provinces where the corporate tax rate is lower, and they put their head office there. When it comes to employees, the people who work for us in this country, they are the ones who suffer when provinces play the game of keeping the low minimum wage so they can attract industry into that particular province.

The federal government wants to take down the barriers for trade in this country, and make us all uniform. At the same time it will not do anything for the workers in this country. It will not recognize that the workers have a right to a decent living and a decent wage wherever they live in this country. Does the Liberal Party agree with that?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Northwest Territories for what was a comment, more than a question.

The answer to the question is obvious. We believe that workers in this country deserve to make a fair wage. That good, hard, honest worker is only trying to raise his or her family. They show up at work every day, get paid a wage, but depending on what area of the

country they are in, continue to struggle with making house payments. It impacts on health. It impacts on the justice system. The studies are many and deep on how living so close to the poverty line impacts on citizens.

Certainly our party does believe that the growth in precarious employment in this country over the last eight years is frightful, and certainly we are committed to trying to address that. This is a small measure to help address that. It is one tool to address it, but certainly so much more has to be done.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Cape Breton—Canso for allowing me to follow him.

This is an interesting debate this morning and throughout the day. I like the idea of the contrast between the leadership of the Liberal Party versus that of the New Democratic Party on this particular issue.

Ever since the leader of the Liberal Party took the position as leader, we have seen a lot more attention in the House of Commons on the issue to the middle class. Finally, the House of Commons wants to give more attention to the issue of the middle class. This is something we believe is very important. It affects us all. If we can somehow improve the living conditions of the middle class in Canada, we would all benefit as a society. That is something we need to achieve.

Yesterday, we had a good, very tangible example. It was an idea that would make a difference. My colleague from Cape Breton made reference to it in his comments when he said that the leader of the Liberal Party followed it up through questions. It is an idea that would generate in excess of a hundred thousand jobs for Canadians—that is, to look at the EI premiums and give refunds to employers who hire Canadians. This is something that would actually generate jobs.

A week ago, the Conservatives came out with a somewhat different plan that in essence would provide a disincentive for employers of more than 12 to actually hire someone. Therefore, it is nice to provide a bit of contrast. The Liberal Party is more focused on the economy, assisting the middle class and creating jobs.

Out of the blue, last week the New Democrats proposed a federal minimum wage of \$15. It is hard to go against that. Jack Layton, an NDP member of Parliament and leader of the New Democratic Party, supported getting rid of the federal minimum wage back in the 90s. However, things have changed, and we recognize that.

It is important to look at minimum wage in terms of how it can lift Canadians as a whole to earning better living wages. One of the ways to do that is to encourage our provinces. As has been pointed out, they are more in tune with the local labour markets.

Business of Supply

I remember as an MLA posing questions to the New Democratic Party, which is in government in Manitoba. I asked it to increase minimum wage. It has been in power since 1999, yet the minimum wage is still, I think, \$10.30 or \$10.40. One of the greatest needs for increasing minimum wage is in the province of Manitoba. That is why, if we want to increase the minimum wage at the grassroots level, we need to get the provinces on board, because when a province increases minimum wage it affects hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

It is somewhat admirable that the NDP wants to reinstitute the federal minimum wage. It will no doubt have an effect, but in actual numbers, it would affect less than a thousand people. In reality, if we really want to increase the living wage for Canadians from coast to coast to coast, we need to look at provincial minimum wages and what role the federal government can take in terms of sitting down, working with the them and articulating where they might be able to increase it, depending quite possibly on regions and so forth.

●(1115)

We are very concerned about how Canada's economy is performing. We want to maximize the economy and the number of jobs being created. Members saw that with the first question that our leader asked yesterday in question period. We want to see jobs being created, because that is a priority for Canadians. Canadians from coast to coast to coast want jobs. They want good quality jobs. They want the economy to do better. Obviously they want good paying jobs, and the Liberal Party is committed to doing just that, wherever possible. The Liberal Party is committed to creating an atmosphere for job creation.

During the summer break, I and my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso toured a hog processing plant in Brandon. There is incompetence at both the provincial and federal government levels, but I want to comment in particular on the federal government's incompetence because it is preventing this plant from hiring. There are jobs there, and the plant is unable to hire people because of the federal government. Capital machinery has been set aside and is not being used because there are no people to run the machinery. The demand for Manitoba pork is very real, but the plant cannot get enough pigs into the processing system to meet that demand.

Those are lost job opportunities that affect everyone. Jobs are available, whether it is selling coffee at Tim Hortons or selling a car. Government can play a more significant role in encouraging and providing incentives.

In this particular situation, there are two things that come to mind for me. One is the temporary foreign worker program. What a mess the Conservative government has made of that program. The government is destroying small businesses across the Prairies and other regions of Canada because of its total incompetence with respect to that particular program. That is a direct way of taking jobs away from Canada's economy, and that is affecting each and every one of us. Shame on the government for not addressing the issue of the temporary foreign worker program.

Then we take a look in terms of ideas that come out. I made reference already to what the leader of the Liberal Party stated yesterday, and I will do it again. Why not provide all employers with the break on employment insurance, thereby giving them an

incentive to hire? Let them be allowed to forego the cost of those premiums on any new hire. This is no more of a cost than what the Conservatives committed to just last week, yet it would create jobs. It has been estimated that more than 150,000 jobs would be created. Why do the Conservatives not recognize their mistakes and take the necessary action to improve upon them? They owe that to all Canadians.

During the summer, all MPs have the opportunity to canvass with our constituents, many of whom have told us that the economy does matter. New Democrats wave this particular change in policy from the nineties when they originally supported getting rid of the federal minimum wage. We can have that discussion today. We in the Liberal Party are open-minded. What really matters is that we want good quality jobs for all Canadians. We want to ensure that the opportunity to excel, the opportunity to have hope, is there.

Over the next number of months we will continue to hold the government accountable for this. We will all win if we can provide good quality paying jobs for Canadians. The middle class needs to be considered a higher priority inside the House of Commons, and the Liberal Party of Canada is committed to doing that.

●(1120)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague with great interest. I think there are a few important notes to look at. Our record is very significant. We agree that creating jobs is important and that creating well-paying jobs is very important, but I would like to contrast the Conservative government with the Liberal government. Single families have gone from 43% to 23% and children living in a two-person home has gone from 8.4% to 5.9%. The number of Canadians living under the low-income level is 8.8%, and of course, we again have had significant and phenomenal success in terms of raising the bar for everyone.

Does my hon. colleague believe that raising the federal minimum wage to \$15, removing it from aligning with the provinces, is really going to have a significant impact on those very favourable numbers that have come about since our government took office?

●(1125)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I would love to see where she draws those numbers from. What I can say is that people actually recognize as fact is that Canada has lost tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs, and those are good-paying jobs, which the government has done very little to protect.

When we go to places like Winnipeg Harvest, we find that the lineups for food banks and so forth continue to grow under the Conservative majority government. There is a whole lot of room for improvement. Yes, they can pull some numbers from here and there and try to make it look good, but at the end of the day, what really matters are the quality jobs. We have seen hundreds of thousands of good manufacturing jobs and others lost because of the incompetence of the government.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would not want to dampen the enthusiasm of the hon. member for Winnipeg North. I agree with him about the government's incompetence. However, I find his solution somewhat laughable.

As party leader, he belongs to the most privileged class in Canada you can imagine, and he is bragging because he hit a home run, but he did not mention that he was born on third base.

Furthermore, the collective impoverishment that Canadians have been experiencing for decades happened mainly under the Liberals.

Can my colleague explain what advantage his leader may have over an Irishman from a large family who became a lawyer while working as a roofer?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the real advantage my leader has is that he is in touch with what Canadians really and truly believe and think. The leader of the Liberal Party constantly goes out and is communicating with everyday Canadians. I would challenge the member or any other member in terms of the degree to which the leader of the Liberal Party has actually been able to make connections with the working class and the middle class in Canada by constantly going out.

I have had the opportunity over 20-plus years as a parliamentarian to work with many different leaders, both at the provincial and federal levels, and never before have I seen a leader so proactively engaged with the common person in Canada. That is what Canadians want and what they are responding to. That is why I believe that the leader of the Liberal Party is in such high demand.

[Translation]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[English]

I am very happy to speak to this very important motion put forward by New Democrats on the minimum wage. What this motion would do, of course, is increase the minimum wage over time to \$15 an hour as a measure to combat inequality and to boost the standards for workers in the federal jurisdiction. It is a very important motion we are debating here today, something that really gets to the heart of what so many Canadians are experiencing, which is growing poverty across the country and certainly a real squeeze on the middle class in Canada.

This motion would also correct the terrible injustice created by the Liberals in 1996 when they eliminated the federal minimum wage, much to their shame. However, even before that, for a decade, the minimum wage had been stagnating in Canada. It had been languishing at just \$4 an hour. When they eliminated the minimum wage, some people actually benefited, because some provinces had a higher minimum wage, but that does not let them off the hook, because what they did was start a downward spiral. In fact, under their watch, inequality increased dramatically. More than 94% of the increase in inequality over the last 35 years has been not under Conservative governments but under Liberal governments. That is

shocking. New Democrats are here to help correct that. We are here to reinstate a minimum wage.

The current government has not been a particular friend of working people. Back in 2006, the federal labour standards review recommended that the federal government reinstate a federal minimum wage and benchmark it to the Statistics Canada low-income cut-off. Of course, that was not done at the time. I introduced a private member's bill at that time calling for the reintroduction of a federal minimum wage but was not successful in getting the support of my colleagues.

I know something about the federal minimum wage. I began my working life in the federal jurisdiction, working for a crown corporation, and I was very fortunate as a young person starting out in the workforce. It is very different for many young people starting today. I went into a workplace that was a crown corporation represented by a union, so I was very privileged to start with a collective agreement, where everyone made the same wage. We had benefits. We had strong working conditions. That is not the case for far too many working people today. In fact, what we often see is that the global economy, in many cases, relies on low wages as a way to boost profits around the world.

We see far too many, young people especially, who are suffering because they are getting contract temporary work and work at low wages with no benefits. That is no way to start out in life, especially for young people who are getting into the workplace already saddled with high student debt because of the dramatic increase in tuition costs in post-secondary education. If we were to ask young people if they think they are going to have pension plans when they retire, overwhelmingly they are going to say no, because they are only temporary and they do not get any benefits, or the employer got rid of the pension plan, or it has become a defined contribution and not a defined benefit pension plan.

Far too many people are losing confidence in the ability of the marketplace to offer them a decent standard of living, and this is at a time when profits are rising, when the top 1%, thanks very much, is doing extremely well here in Canada and around the world. Yet the average family is being squeezed and too many people are living in poverty.

• (1130)

There is a constituent of mine in Toronto, Professor David Hulchanski, from the University of Toronto, who has written a report called "The 3 Cities within Toronto, Income Polarization". What he talks about in that report is that other cities, not just the city of Toronto, are increasingly becoming three cities. The people at the top are increasing their wealth and doing better. There is a shrinking number of people in the middle, and their incomes are pretty much stagnating. Then there is a growing number of people at the bottom who are losing their ability to make ends meet and who cannot keep their heads above poverty.

Business of Supply

This House, back in 1989, voted to eliminate child poverty. I wonder if people here today know how many kids in Canada are living below the Statistics Canada level for low income. It is close to one million children in Canada. These children are poor because their parents are poor, and far too many of those parents are working. They are trying to make ends meet. They go to work every day, and they cannot get their heads above poverty.

Canada needs a pay increase. This particular motion would not do everything. It would not solve all of the problems, but it would be a very positive step. I salute my colleague who introduced this motion, and I salute the House for having this debate today. It is extremely important that we talk about the pay levels people are getting.

We talk about CEO paycheques and how they are spiralling out of control. They are getting many millions of dollars, sometimes for seeing the business they run decline. Sometimes we see huge payouts for people who work for a company for just a very short couple of years, yet we have a growing number of bankruptcies, where working people who have spent their lives building their company are then thrown out of work.

We need to send the signal that it is not right to pay people rock bottom wages. If people work full time and they contribute to the economy, they deserve to get a decent level of pay.

It is not just the labour movement that is supporting this kind of change, although I will quote from Jerry Dias, the president of Unifor, who said:

Minimum wage jobs are not only for the after-school crowd of kids looking for spending money, but also an entry into the workforce for immigrants, recent graduates and many others who can only find part-time work and need to hold down two or three jobs to survive.

He certainly supports an increase in the minimum wage.

I will also quote from the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, Paul Meinema. He said that a \$15 minimum wage would be a bold step towards establishing the principle that no full-time worker in Canada should live in poverty. He said that he was delighted to see the NDP taking a leadership role in advancing this important tool for combatting poverty and rising inequality.

This clearly makes sense for working people and for people who represent working people, but it is not just labour that supports this. Let me quote from a very recent editorial in the *New York Times*. They were commenting on the German increase in minimum wage, which is going up to \$11.60, or 8.5 euros, next year. This is what the *New York Times* said:

In Germany, as in the United States, business lobbyists and some economists have warned that a robust minimum wage will lead to job losses and higher prices, but that has not been the historical experience. Rather, higher wages for low-wage workers are generally offset by lower labor turnover, while the boost in consumer spending from higher wages is good for the economy. Boosting consumer demand is especially important in Germany, whose economy is overly reliant on exports.

I submit that it is also essential here in Canada. I urge every one of my colleagues to support this call for a higher minimum wage. Let us get Canadians an increase. Let us give them a pay boost.

• (1135)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, obviously I find the debate very interesting today because it is an important debate.

Our government believes that the best way to move people above the low-income cut-off is through measures such as creating jobs. The NDP has put forward a motion that will affect 0.05% of the workforce. That is a very small number. That is the federally regulated workforce. This is not impacting the provinces.

The NDP provincial governments have not taken it upon themselves to move up, because they recognize there are some issues with the plan.

What we have is a plan to create well-paying jobs. I would like to note, again, that the number of Canadians living below the low-income cut-off is at its lowest in history. We have a plan. Our plan is working.

Does the member see that this affects 0.05% of the federal workforce, approximately 400 families. It is going to have an impact in terms of the important things that we need to do to create good jobs across Canada.

• (1140)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, of course we have to create good quality jobs. Of course. We are completely, unanimously in support of creating good quality jobs. However, a good quality job also means a decent level of pay. It means not working for poverty level wages. Surely to goodness we can all agree on that.

We can quibble about how many workers are going to be affected by this. We happen to believe that in fact many tens of thousands of workers in the federal jurisdiction are now earning less than \$15 an hour and would benefit from this change. There are lots of very low-paying jobs created in Canada today by companies that are making multi-million or sometimes billion-dollar profits. It is about sharing a bit of the prosperity, creating good jobs, and making sure that everybody benefits from that.

I will also say that the provinces have a key role to play. Most workers in Canada are under provincial jurisdiction. However, reinstating the federal minimum wage and setting it at a decent level will have the impact of spurring on the provinces. People will point to that and say that if the federal minimum wage is \$15 an hour, something is wrong with my province. They will want to know why they cannot earn that wage in their part of the country.

This would be a good thing for all Canadians.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her very instructive discussion here today. It is important for all members of the House to hear what is happening out in the communities.

One of the things my colleague mentioned was this quibbling about numbers. There has been a lot of quibbling and a lack of looking at the big picture.

Business of Supply

I am the critic for seniors issues. In my dialogue with the community, I have discovered that not only is there a quarter of a million seniors living below the poverty level, but that poverty began because of low-paying jobs and a lack of opportunity. If we are going to address the reality of senior poverty and health in the future, as well as the health of the entire community, we have to start looking at the minimum wage.

My concern has to do with the cost of poverty to the economy. I have heard a figure as high as \$30 billion in terms of health care costs and children going without. I wonder if my colleague would care to comment on that.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, poverty has a huge cost to our society.

One of the other terrible things that the Liberals did was abolish our national housing strategy. The cost of housing has been a huge factor in the increase in poverty. It costs all of us.

Health care costs rise the more a society is unequal. Giving individuals and families the wherewithal to keep a roof over their heads and put healthy food on the table, does not just benefit those individuals, it benefits us all as a society.

We understand the social determinants of health, and we are determined that no Canadian should be left behind.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege for me to rise to speak to this very important matter: reinstating a minimum wage for businesses under federal jurisdiction. It is something I feel very strongly about.

As the member of Parliament for the riding of Beauport—Limoilou, in the Quebec City area, I see that the riding has quite a lot of disadvantaged individuals and even people living in poverty and exclusion. As the representative for my constituents who struggle daily and as a long-term resident in the area—because I have lived in various parts of Limoilou in the past 20 years and it was there that I raised my son, who recently turned 24—I can tell you I was a worker earning a relatively low income, and as such I have experienced close up the challenges associated with the living conditions and fairly limited incomes in a rapidly changing market.

When I moved to Limoilou in the early 1990s, rent was a lot lower than it is now. You could rent a two-bedroom apartment for less than half of what it costs now per month. There has been a major change in that regard. It is a change that has prompted many families to turn to food banks. I am not just talking about families who rely on welfare, but workers too. I have seen this over the past three years. In a few months, on Christmas Eve, I will go on my fourth food bank tour. As I did last year, I will no doubt hear that needs are growing, that the food banks have fewer and fewer resources and, above all, that people who make an honest living in a one- or two-income family are no longer able to put enough food on the table.

This is not surprising given that successive Conservative and Liberal governments have been going in the wrong direction for over 30 years. We are all elected to represent the people in our ridings. All of us, without exception, are MPs who represent all of the people in our ridings. The reality is that over 80% of my constituents are no longer on the winning team that is benefiting from the economic

activity and community life here in Canada. Frankly, that is disappointing.

In Quebec, we have a very simple expression that means that a person is born into a lower class with very few opportunities for the future and that he is resigned to the fact that he and his children will remain in that state. As an individual and especially as an MP, I refuse to accept that state. If my Conservative and Liberal colleagues want to impose that resignation on Canadians at any price, then they are free to do so, but I will not. That is why I have been a committed member of the NDP for nearly 10 years. My active commitment to the party began when I agreed to run as a candidate for the first time in 2005. That is why I will continue to be a member of the NDP for a long time so that I can fight in order to give most people in this country a chance to improve their lot. I will fight so that they have real opportunities, not opportunities that are tied to partisan political marketing schemes. I am talking about real, measurable, tangible opportunities.

● (1145)

Our proposal is to reinstate the federal minimum wage and ultimately bring it up to \$15 an hour.

There is no denying that this is one particular measure, but also one specific measure of a set of measures, seeking to encourage income sharing among as many people as possible and especially the sharing of wealth. It is also meant to encourage the return to jobs that are much more stable and to a work and entrepreneurship environment that is much more predictable and robust.

I have had the privilege of sitting on four different committees. Right now, I am on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology and I am very happy about that. Having had the privilege of sitting on the Standing Committee on International Trade and the Standing Committee on Finance, I was truly able to see how ignorant my colleagues in the other parties are when it comes to the competitiveness issues facing the vast majority of Canadian businesses.

Regardless of our entrepreneurs' level of activity, whether they are sole business owners or they own businesses with 100 or 200 employees, they have a strong case for needing long-term projections and a certain degree of stability to be able to grow and pay all their employees.

Our measure provides this stable environment for the entire Canadian business community. Notwithstanding the fact that we will set a standard for businesses under federal jurisdiction, there is another purpose: the provinces are expected to follow suit and raise the minimum wage in their own legislation.

Business of Supply

Let me go back to the dust contamination caused by the Port of Québec, because my constituents in Beauport—Limoilou are very concerned about it. Over the past decades, the Conservatives and the Liberals have shown us that they are at the beck and call of big business. For instance, four or five senior executives from Quebec Stevedoring, the company at fault in the dust contamination in Limoilou, have made political contributions totalling nearly \$20,000 to the Conservative Party in the last 10 years.

That is perfectly legal. However, it speaks volumes about the Conservatives' inaction and paralysis in terms of their refusal to take action, whether to address a public health issue such as the issue facing the people of Limoilou or to address the rapid deterioration of the living conditions of Canadian families.

Having sat for one year on the Standing Committee on Finance, I would like to quote from the brief submitted by the Canadian Medical Association. I hope this will give my Liberal and Conservative colleagues some food for thought, especially if they take the time to listen.

Recently, my leader, the leader of the official opposition and future prime minister of Canada, gave a speech to the Canadian Medical Association. He talked about the problem and the importance of the social determinants of health.

According to a report by the Canadian Medical Association, the 20% of the population with the highest income lives an average of three years longer than the 20% with the lowest income. Suicide rates are two times higher for the poorest 20% of the population than for the richest 20%. Cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases and diabetes are much more prevalent in the poorest 20% of families than in the richest 20% of families.

That is what I am seeing in Beauport—Limoilou, and that is why I support this measure. I am pleased to do so and I am looking forward to my colleagues' questions and comments.

• (1150)

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an unidentified economist wrote, “rent controls are the best way to destroy a city other than bombing”. In the same way, it is what minimum wages can do to destroy an economy. We know that employers, the people who are the business owners, are going to have to pass these costs on to the goods and services they produce, so we are looking at increased inflation.

Right now we have young people who are looking to get into jobs, and there are a finite number of jobs for these young people to undertake. Could the member give us any information from the work the NDP has done on finding out how this kind of motion, if passed, would influence and impact the number of jobs available for our young people who are so anxious to get into the workforce now?

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. It was funny how she started with a quote from an unidentified economist. Maybe it was an economist in the Prime Minister's Office. Who knows?

To answer her question, I think that the government displayed its ignorance about the economic impact and the importance of making decisions that benefit as many people as possible in the federal pension file.

I would like to point out that we proposed increasing benefits by adjusting contributions, which is the most efficient savings vehicle because the management fees are lower. The government handily displayed its ignorance by talking about taxes when what we really need to do is encourage people to save money. Households have a major debt problem. People have to save money.

The government does not even understand this basic fact. It needs to be replaced.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is pathetic that the Minister of Labour quoted 2008 statistics as justification for her argument about the labour rates in Canada. That speaks volumes about the Conservative government which has cut back on Statistics Canada finding out what is actually happening with Canadians.

When we look at the 2008 statistics, we find that the minimum wage at the time was around \$8 across the country. Yes, perhaps there were a few people in the federal system who were earning \$8, but we are talking about \$15. The difference in those statistics means that there were tens of thousands of people in 2008 who were not earning \$15 working for the federal government, and we have not seen that much wage inflation in those six years since 2008. We know darn well that right now many Canadians who work under federal jurisdiction do not earn \$15 an hour and could benefit from this program.

Does my colleague not agree that this shows the terrible situation we have when the federal Minister of Labour has to rely on 2008 statistics and to misinterpret them in presenting them to Parliament?

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Northwest Territories for his question and his enlightening comments.

We get the feeling that big business and spin doctors are dominating Conservative thought.

Yesterday, the CBC aired an interesting report stating that the Prime Minister was both right and wrong about employment. It is true that there have never been more jobs, but in relative terms, the situation is disastrous. In no way have we caught up to where we were before 2008. The government is refusing to admit that. Many of the backbenchers are refusing to understand that or are incapable of understanding it. Families are suffocating and they need air. It is time to do something about it.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate today. Canada's economic well-being and ability to harness the benefits of its ambitious trade agenda depend absolutely on our labour force.

It is unusual for us to be debating an issue about raising the minimum wage. The NDP consistently votes against things like WITB, the working income tax benefit, and the decrease in the GST. Our government has taken many measures to support people with low-income cut-off levels, and indeed they are working. We have the lowest number, I believe 8.8%, of people who are working at the low-income cut-off level. That is still not good enough and we continue to support jobs and opportunity. Again, consistently the NDP members vote against them. Whether it is natural resource projects and development, we see a consistent pattern of the NDP voting against things that truly would help people near that low-income cut-off level.

We are debating a motion that strictly looks at the workers in federally regulated workforce. We know the vast majority of them are well above the minimum wage or the planned \$15. We have a small number of families that would be impacted, but again the NDP consistently votes against the millions and millions of people who would have been supported with items like the working income tax benefit. However, we are here to discuss minimum wage.

What my hon. colleague is suggesting with the motion is that the federal government should unilaterally push ahead with a substantial increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The logic is that the provinces would have no choice but to follow along. The provinces have very specific systems in place where they look at a number of different measures. They review them regularly. To suggest that the provinces are just going to follow along is perhaps a little naive because the provinces look very carefully and very hard at what they are doing and where we are going.

As all hon. members know, in 1996 the Government of Canada got out of the business of setting a separate minimum wage for workers under the federal jurisdiction. Instead, we pegged the minimum wage for workers under the federal jurisdiction to the provincial minimum wage of the province in which the person worked. Since we have been office, we have seen no reason to change that, and the motion of the hon. member or the debate has not convinced me that we should change it.

We need to remember that it is only a small percentage of the Canadian workforce and enterprises under federal jurisdiction. Most of them are higher income jobs and minimum wages are not very common in federally regulated workplaces. To go back to the federal jurisdiction workplace survey 2008, it was 416 employees. We could argue about how things might have changed a little over time, but it is important to think it probably will be relatively similar. We are talking about 0.05% of all employees under federal jurisdiction.

The provincial governments are much better suited, especially considering the millions of workers under their jurisdiction, to set a minimum wage for them and for the very small percentage of the federally regulated workers. Again, we changed the system 1996. The provinces have not been asking for any changes. We have a

system that in past years virtually all provinces and territories have increased the minimum wage rates in many cases after reviews by minimum wage boards or independent experts.

Rather than rewording the Labour Code and encroaching on provincial decisions, our government is taking a better route to ensure the well-being of Canadian workers and their families. We are focusing on what we consider may be the single biggest challenge to our economic health: ensuring that we have people to fill the jobs our growing economy requires both now and into the future. The measures we are taking fit into Canada's economic landscape right now.

Canada's economy is performing soundly in the context of a global economic recovery. We have had 1.1 million jobs created since July 2009 and over 80% of these jobs have been in full-time positions, nearly 80% are in the private sector and over 65% are in high wage industries.

● (1200)

Canada is now the only country in the world to have tariff-free access to the American market of 300 million people and the European market of 500 million people. I love the quote of the B.C. cattlemen when they heard about the Canada-European free trade agreement and the was access to 500 million hungry customers. They are seeing absolute opportunity in these free trade agreements. After going through many years of very difficult times since the BSE crisis, they are happy to see the support our government has provided.

We are seeing a resurgence in industry like mining and oil and gas in Canada, which helps to drive the construction sector. If one were to drive up Highway 5, one would see significant piping heading up to Alberta. With hundreds of resource projects scheduled to come on stream over the next decade, there are a myriad of economic opportunities for Canadians now and in the upcoming years.

We have some challenges, and the problem is that there are not enough people with the skills required for the jobs which are in demand now and into the future. These will be real and potentially dire consequences on our economy and the well-being of Canadians if we do not adequately address this challenge. Many regions and sectors across the country can attest to that.

The mining industry, for instance, says that it will need 145,000 more workers by the year 2020. The petroleum sector estimates it will need up to 150,000 workers by 2022.

Others might suggest that if the opposition wants to support better jobs, it can support the high-wage unionized jobs provided in Canada's oil sands.

Business of Supply

BuildForce says that we will need 300,000 workers in the construction trade alone over the next 10 years. At the same time, there will be 550,000 unskilled workers who will be unable to find work by 2016, according to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. That number could be well over a million by 2021.

It really becomes very clear when the question is asked where we as a government should focus. We have to ensure that the employees will have the right skill sets for both the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow.

We are looking at employer-driven solutions, such as the Canada job grant. The foundation of the grant, as we know, is a Canada job grant, an employer-driven approach to help Canadians gain the skills and training they will need to fill available jobs.

We are finalizing agreements with all the provinces and territories, and several of them are now accepting applications from employers with a plan to train people for the jobs. It is a critical step in ensuring Canadians are equipped and prepared for the jobs out there, but it is not enough considering the high demand for skilled trades in the years to come, particularly in the mining and energy sectors.

Over the years, we have had a real focus in the area of skills, trades and apprenticeships and have helped six million young people get the skills and experience needed to find better jobs through different programs.

Our youth unemployment is still stubbornly high and it has nearly doubled the national unemployment rate. Everyone can see why we needed to change our approach. We need to give a message to students that entering a trade is a good move forward. Having a university degree is great, but we need to also look at other opportunities. The trades present enormous opportunities for young people. The opportunities are there if they choose to pursue them.

We have partnered with several colleges and training institutions to try to turn this around and get more businesses directly involved in the process so there is a better match with skills taught and skills needed.

I have to give a quick example. The riding I represent, Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, has a partnership with the university and the local home builders' association. Every year, they have students build a house that ultimately gets auctioned off by the YMCA. The home builders' association gives the students real-life experience. It is an absolutely phenomenal program. Then the YMCA has the benefit of using that home as a major fundraiser.

• (1205)

In addition to the apprenticeship grants, of which we have issued more than 500,000 to help apprentices pursue and complete their training, we have also provided tax credits to the apprentices and the apprentice employers.

The new Canada apprentice loan will also be available in January 2015. That was well received at Thompson Rivers University. This loan would provide apprentices in a Red Seal trade with interest-free loans of up to \$4,000 to complete their training. The Minister of Employment also received strong agreement from the provincial and territorial governments at the meeting of labour market ministers this

summer to move forward aggressively to harmonize apprenticeship training. We want to encourage labour mobility, not to restrict it.

New Canadians, people with disabilities and aboriginal people represent a real untapped potential, and we cannot afford to let any qualified people sit on the sidelines. We need all our talent at work to guarantee our prosperity. That is why we are investing in initiatives that will help underrepresented groups join the workforce. For example, we have this tremendous opportunity to improve economic opportunities for aboriginal people because of the large-scale natural resource projects on the horizons, which are situated where they live. If we work with partners in the first nations communities, we can help many unemployed aboriginal people realize their potential and participate in our country's prosperity.

As members can see, our government is heavily investing in job skills and training of all Canadians so they can secure a better future. This is how we plan to ensure the well-being of families and ultimately the economic health of our country.

Our government is committed to ensuring that workplaces are also fair, safe and productive. We have stuck to our commitment and have taken important steps to improve labour market standards for the protection of employees. A program that comes to mind is the wage earner protection program. Since its coming into force in July 2008, more than 74,000 Canadians have received \$174.8 million in WEPP payments. This program was enacted to protect the wages, vacation pay, severance and termination pay owed to workers if their employers go bankrupt or into receivership.

Another important initiative by this government was the Helping Families in Need Act. This act allows employees under federal jurisdiction to take unpaid leave under various circumstances in order to care for their families. For this reason, it is clear that the government has acted in the best interests of Canadians to protect them in their workplace.

Business of Supply

Another example of how we are working to improve economic prospects and create more jobs was announced last week by the Minister of Finance. That is the small business job credit, which was very well received by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Over the next two years this would save job creators \$550 million, which they can use to hire more Canadians. The plan would effectively lower the EI premiums for small business by 15%. According to the CFIB, this would create 25,000 person-years of employment. That is great news. Therefore, we are strongly supporting Canadian families with these important measures.

Under our government, Canadian families at all income levels have seen increases of about 10% in their real after-tax income. The lowest income Canadians have seen a 14% increase. I mentioned this earlier in some of my questions, noting the number of Canadians living below the low income cut-off is now at its lowest level ever, 8.8%, according to Statistics Canada.

Our low income rates have dropped dramatically under the government. For example, children in female single-parent homes have dropped from 43% of low income families in 2002 to 23% in 2011. Therefore, the measures we have taken are having a huge and important impact on these children and families. Children in two-parent families have dropped from 8.4% of low income families in 2004 to 5.9% in 2011. In other words, we are making steady progress and moving more people up the economic ladder, out of poverty and into better paying jobs and better futures for themselves and their children. For this reason, we do not think that the motion put forward by the opposition would add to our steady progress, and we urge all members not to support it.

• (1210)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, where do I begin, with the government completely blind to the economic realities that are taking place, with the outpacing of the Canadian economy now by the U.S. economy by, perhaps, three or four times? Parts of Europe and others among our competitors are outpacing Canada. This is so reminiscent of when the great recession first hit, when the Conservatives said, “What recession?” In fact, as the rest of the world was bringing in budgets to augment their economies, the Conservatives brought in a budget that was an austerity budget that would have made the length and depth of the recession so much worse.

I have a specific question for my friend, because what we are talking about is a moderate and gradual increase of the federal minimum wage from where it is presently to \$15 an hour in five years' time. I hardly think she would go to her constituents and say they deserve to earn far less than \$15 an hour. I do not think, with the cost of living in Kamloops or other parts of British Columbia, that people working 40 hours a week at \$10 an hour can afford to put food on the table for their family. Perhaps she does know a way to do that, but I suspect she would not enjoy that quality of life. I am just guessing. Therefore, if it is good enough for her, her colleagues and her friends, then certainly it is good enough for working Canadians who are saying they work hard, pay their fair share and certainly should have a reasonable income.

She talks about all these high-paying jobs. We have lost 350,000 manufacturing jobs in Canada since the recession started. Would this not go some way to help those who are struggling along at the lower

ends to achieve some modicum of decency and respect in our society?

• (1215)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, things like our working income tax benefit have had an enormous impact across the country.

The NDP voted in 1996 to align with the provinces. Our government respects the provinces. We believe they are in a good position to look at the local market conditions and the minimum wages. Every single province and territory has comprehensive systems in place. As with the decision that was made in 1996, we very appropriately believe in having the federally regulated workforce aligned with the provinces in which they work.

We have had a number of NDP governments making decisions about minimum wages. They have been making those decisions based on the local conditions. What we are saying is that we do not need to make this change.

However, I sure would like to see the NDP support the development of our natural resources and support things like our working income tax benefit.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour for her contribution to the debate. I basically have two questions for her.

First, before the government concludes that it will not be supporting the motion before the House, what studies has it done to conclude that the federal minimum wage should not be raised?

Second, she noted that we are supporting high-paying jobs in the oil sands. Would she also be supportive of the same for the Ring of Fire in Ontario?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague to the House. We look forward to many opportunities to debate issues over the upcoming year.

What we have talked about is really jurisdiction and impact. What we have consistently said is that it is appropriate for provincial governments to have systems in place, with the flexibility and agility that really relates to their local market conditions, and therefore, as a federal government with a small federally regulated workforce, we believe it is most appropriate to align with the decisions that are made in the provinces.

In actual fact it was his government that introduced that change, and we continue to support the mechanism that was made at that time.

Business of Supply

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention by the parliamentary secretary on this important debate. She characterized the position of the opposition moving the motion as saying that the provinces have “no choice but to follow along”. Would not guidance by the federal government in this domain have a positive impact on provinces and territories that are paying—as perhaps in the province we both represent—only \$10.25 an hour? This is a wage that, really, for most people in our province would be impossible to live on; yet that is the minimum wage. Even if it affected only a few federal workers at this moment, would this initiative not have a positive impact in providing guidance to the provinces and territories?

Also, if the government is in favour of business regulation, such as the idea of a national securities regulator and pushing that to the provinces, why would it not likewise support this for workers?

● (1220)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that labour is predominantly in the provincial jurisdiction. The majority of workers are in the provincial jurisdiction. To be quite frank, we have a government that respects jurisdiction. It respects jurisdiction for health care. We believe that sometimes the federal government is the most important group to provide guidance—in areas such as national security—but we think that in determining labour market wages, the provinces are really well positioned. They have the structures and mechanisms in place, and we support continuing with the system we have in place.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue and for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of my hon. colleague very closely. In a nutshell, she pointed out in her speech that in the next five to seven years in Canada, we will be requiring in the neighbourhood of 700,000 to a million to 1.1 million new qualified workers for very high-paying, good jobs in this country. That is a huge challenge.

Had New Democrats taken their time and effort to talk about that challenge, I think we could have a much more vigorous debate. Instead, they picked a very narrow, very small segment of the federal civil service, some 396 or so individuals whom they think should be paid a couple more bucks an hour. Not that it is not important, but is that what we should be talking about today? We have some really huge issues facing this country, which we really do need to work together to try to solve.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue and for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

I think we did clearly articulate what the upcoming labour needs will be across this country. My children are in their twenties; I had thought the world would totally be their oyster because the baby boomers would have moved on, although the baby boomers are a little slower in moving on. We have some enormous challenges ahead of us in terms of our labour workforce, and that is where our government is focused.

I would like to bring up the working income tax benefit and a number of important initiatives that we have introduced to help people with lower incomes: the average family of four now saves

\$3,500; we reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%; we have introduced measures in terms of supporting families; seniors' pension splitting is another measure that has really supported families. It is an important debate to be really focused on what the upcoming labour needs will be in this country, and we have some huge challenges ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for moving this motion today. It is a very simple, very specific and very fair motion for Canadian workers.

This proposal will help the workers of this country, especially the younger generation of workers, whose salary has not increased, as well as the middle class and the poor. The statistics are also very clear. There is a very serious problem for the government, society and the economy when the poorest workers' wages have gone up by only 1¢ over the past 40 years. That is unbelievable to anyone who thinks that a society should be more fair and that there should not be such a large gap between the very rich and the poor.

[*English*]

This is a proposal the Conservatives have been arguing all day is not important because it would not impact many people but is terrible and must be opposed because it would have such an enormous impact on our economy. Never to let contradiction get in the way of a Conservative argument, it has to be one or the other. If they are going to get back to their talking points, I suggest that they pick one of those criticisms and then go with that, because they have offered up both. The Conservatives say that it would only apply to a couple of people but if it were to actually exist in reality it would destroy the economy. It is quite incredible that so few workers could affect so many millions of people. Of course, it is neither of those things.

This is a very moderate proposal to reinstate the minimum wage that was taken out after it had been stagnant for many years at \$4 an hour. It is to reinstate that federal minimum wage and to gradually, over five years, increase it to a level that, at \$15 an hour, most Canadians, with the cost of living today, in 2014, would suggest is not getting anyone rich. We are seeking to apply this to those who fall under federal jurisdiction and is absolutely respecting provincial jurisdiction, another criticism; for some reason the Conservatives suddenly are new-found lovers of the provinces' rights and jurisdiction. This is an amazing moment for me to watch Conservatives who have imposed so much on our provincial cousins, mostly in downloading many of the health and transfer costs onto the backs of the provinces, which then download it onto the backs of our cities and municipalities.

Business of Supply

Take that other contradiction aside. What this proposal suggests we do in 2014, in a modern society and a progressive economy, which is what New Democrats will be proposing come the next election and now, is to very moderately increase that minimum wage, reinstate that federal condition, and bring it from where it is presently, which is ridiculously ineffectual and non-existent at \$4 an hour, up to \$15 an hour. This might not immediately impact more than 40,000 or upwards of 100,000 workers in Canada, but for someone on the Conservative benches to say that this is meaningless is to suggest that those 100,000-plus workers and their families are of no meaning to them. That is insulting, and I hope that is not what my Conservative colleagues mean.

If we can start to suggest it for those employees who are regulated in the banking and transportation sectors, jurisdictions regulated by the federal government, we have some leadership role to play. We have seen the stagnation of the middle class and the lower economic classes in Canadian society, even as our economy overall has grown in the last 30 to 40 years. If we see that it is not being shared at all equally and has in fact been concentrating up in that higher 5% and 1% of income earners, with the haves having more, then we should take a step back and understand that there may be some role for government and business to play in this.

As a former small business owner myself, one of the things I know small business owners need is not a government obsessed with one tool in the tool box. Whether their taxation level is this or is that, they need fairness, but they also need customers. One thing we know about measures like this, and it has been studied extensively across academia and by those who work in the business community, is that a slight raise in the minimum wage often offers enormous economic benefits to small and medium businesses. It just makes common sense that those who are earning \$12, \$14, and \$15 an hour are much more likely to spend those dollars locally than those making \$150 and \$200 an hour. That only makes sense for those small and medium businesses that exist within Canada.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, as an aside, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague from Joliette. I apologize for not mentioning it earlier.

[*English*]

This can help small and medium local economies, something that is of great interest to New Democrats.

We have put forward a number of proposals. We put forward a proposal in the last election that the Conservatives lambasted then picked up and put into their budget. That proposal was to connect a tax credit for people who are doing the hiring to an actual hire. This is a radical notion, I know. It suggests that the government is going to give small or medium businesses a break on their taxes when they hire someone as opposed to the largesse that has been showered on some of the wealthiest corporations in Canada for the last 25 years, and I am talking in the order of tens of billions of dollars in tax cuts with no strings attached whatsoever.

The Conservatives and before them the Liberal government simply trusted the largest companies, the banks, and the oil and gas

companies, those companies that were making the most profit and that stood to gain the most from those corporate tax cuts. The idea was that they would reinvest and hire more, but that was not the case. We know that was not the case, because our dear friend, the former finance minister, Jim Flaherty, stood in front of that same business community not a year and a half ago and chastised them, as did the former governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, for all of this “dead money” that was sitting in corporate Canada’s coffers. All of the tax cuts that had been given to the largest companies in corporate Canada had not been reinvested in research and development or in hiring more employees, for various reasons. Corporate Canada can answer those questions.

We as New Democrats feel that there is no such thing as a free lunch. If we are going to aid individual businesses in certain sectors, that should be somehow a quid pro quo with the larger society and they are going to hire someone with that help.

What we are offering today is a very clear and concise proposal that would not only help working families but would help those small and medium businesses that are, as the parliamentary secretary said, the job creators of today.

There is also, of course, a ripple effect. Some provinces are lagging behind and are racing to the bottom to try to attract business by suggesting that there is no opportunity or duty on behalf of business to pay taxes for all those schools and bridges that we are constantly referencing in our taxes and tax policy. Those provinces that have lagged behind and have said that \$8, \$9, or \$10 an hour is fine for people to make a living on feel that Canadians can feed their families on that amount as electricity and utility prices go up, as the cost of education does nothing but go up, and as the basic cost of living goes up. Clearly, that creates an unfair society, which, by the way, we know both anecdotally and empirically leads to a much more expensive society. When the gap between the have and the have-nots widens to a greater extent, all of those social services bear more. There is more crime. There is more cost to society at large, and there is less peace.

We should all seek to remember our guiding light: peace, order, and good government. That is meant to show the way for all governments in Canada, regardless of their political stripe. The Conservative government would not know that if it came up and smacked it on the nose.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives have often quoted here today that the CFIB has been a great proponent of the finance minister's latest proposal, another that is essentially *carte blanche*, with his strange dividing line on EI premiums. He drew two strange lines in the sand on lowering EI premiums for Canadian companies. One was for employers that hit below a certain annual amount in contributions in EI premiums. If an employer paid \$1 more in EI premiums, that employer would get zero benefit from this new program. A bunch of employers have now entered into the public discussion. They are saying that if they were \$10 over in EI premiums and they would get no benefit from this new tax break, then there would be an incentive for them to let somebody go to get below the line.

The second line the government chose, and we see this as fundamental unfairness by the government, is that it excluded workers from any of that benefit. Workers will continue to pay into an EI program that only 35% of them can actually access. The government is going to give the break to employers exclusively. Why would the government do something like that unless it had a particular hate on for working people? That makes no sense at all, because they are the ones who pay the taxes. They are the ones who voted for us and put us here to make sure that we have a thriving and surviving country.

Income inequality is something we all need to address, whatever our political persuasion. We want programs that work and that are moderate and fair. We think that today we have proposed just that. We are proposing to move the federal minimum wage over time up to \$15 an hour. It seems like basic fairness, basic economic common sense, and something that I am surprised the Conservatives cannot find their twisted logical way through to support to help Canadian workers out for once.

● (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his very informative speech.

At the end of my speech, I talked about the Canadian Medical Association report published as part of the study on inequality conducted by the Standing Committee on Finance. Our leader, the future prime minister of Canada, also referred to that report this summer in his speech before the Canadian Medical Association. Clearly, Canadian doctors are very worried about income inequality. In fact, a large segment of the population no longer has the means to secure decent living conditions, which is one of the so-called “determinants of health”.

One thing that is very clear in this debate is that increasing the minimum wage to \$15 would make it easier for several hundred thousand people to live their lives in dignity.

I wonder if my colleague could talk about the impact that such an increase in the minimum wage could have on the health, well-being and quality of life of Canadians.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Minimum wage is a very important issue, because it has an impact on everyone's quality of life.

● (1235)

[English]

I will add one more thing, because this is about the government making choices. We have seen the Conservatives go out on this income-splitting scheme, some multiple billions of dollars that is going to help fewer than 15% of Canadians, and not the Canadians my friend references, those in the middle. Those earning at the lower end of the spectrum will not be helped by a multi-billion-dollar tax scheme proposed by the government.

That is what it plans to do with the surplus that has been so hard fought for through all those cuts to services for Canadians, veterans, our food inspection. All of that was to pay for what: something to help out the 15% who likely need it least and who are least likely to reinvest it back into the Canadian economy.

This is when orthodoxy and ideology rule out any kind of economic sense and evidence. We know that government is always about choices. We propose choices, like the choice in front of us today, that will directly and importantly help those who need the help.

Why would the Conservatives possibly want to say that for people who are earning \$10 or \$11 an hour, that it is where they should stay, and their families should survive by just making do. The Conservatives are saying that the rest of us are fine on the salaries an MP makes. That is some contradiction in terms.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member.

The question I have is in regard to the impression many might be receiving that the NDP are proposing a minimum wage across Canada that would affect all Canadians. We know that to not necessarily be accurate.

I wonder if the member might want to highlight that what we are really talking about are federally regulated wages. As my colleague, the Liberal critic, said, this does not apply to people who are flipping hamburgers and so forth. This is a very important point for us to make during today's debate.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I actually made that point in my speech. We will get it up on YouTube to have the full reference.

We talked about the initial impact of this being on those perhaps 40,000 federally regulated workers who now fall below this kind of minimum wage threshold we are talking about. As many as 100,000 workers who are earning around \$12.50 an hour would also be impacted.

We do not speak of this in broad terms in its initial output, but it will have some impact on a broader societal level. If those who are working in an airport are receiving a new federal minimum wage, and the provincial standard is much lower just outside the airport, one would imagine that this might have some influence and impact on our provincial colleagues. However, that is their choice.

Business of Supply

All I would say is this: If there are almost a million new minimum wage jobs that have been created since the government took over, an increase of 66%, that should give all of us pause as to where those new jobs are being created. This is also from a government that has brought in over 350,000 temporary foreign workers a year, which has also helped to suppress wages in Canada, according to various studies from very Conservative think tanks that have looked at it.

Time and again, the Conservatives talk about helping out Canadian families, yet time and again, the evidence is contrary. Why do we not do something that would actually and obviously help out working families in Canada? As my friend said, it would not be everyone immediately. That is why this is a moderate proposal. This is a proposal that we should make things just a little bit better for those who could use the hand up, and a lot of that help will come back to the larger Canadian economy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to take this opportunity to speak to the House about the concept of privilege. As everyone knows, members of Parliament are afforded more privileges than other citizens.

We all function in a world of privilege. I, for one, have not always been privy to that reality. I have been an entrepreneur and a farmer; I have been wealthy and I have been poor. I know what money means to the middle class and the poor. It always upsets me when I talk to women on the telephone who tell me that they do not have enough money for their children to live comfortably.

I know that the workers who get up early each morning deserve every dollar they earn, and that is why we need to recognize that a \$15 minimum wage for federal employees is not too much to ask. We know that women continue to earn less, yet we are still asking them to set money aside for retirement. How will they manage to do that on \$10 an hour? Then they will be told that they do not know how to budget.

For me, \$15 an hour is about decency. Housing costs are on the rise and Canadians families also have to deal with skyrocketing gas prices. We know what that means: it costs more to get to work. In an area such as Joliette, work is sometimes 30 minutes or an hour away. Some people will tell you that they travel three hours to Montreal. When the price of gas goes up, the cost of food goes up, too. Buying groceries is very expensive.

I have children. One has four girls between the ages of 12 and 24. Two of them are working. Imagine how much it costs to feed that family.

The Liberals abolished the federal minimum wage in 1996. Perhaps those who are sitting here today have never known what it was like to earn less than \$15 an hour. Meanwhile, the GDP is going up and the government is bragging about strong economic growth, but salaries are stagnating.

In the past 35 years, 94% of the increase in income inequality has occurred under Liberal governments. This speaks volumes about that party's respect for the middle class. During that time, workers got up early and continued to slave away for every dollar they earned. However, between 1975 and 2013, the average minimum wage increased by only 1¢, and pennies are not even being made anymore.

In 2006, the Federal Labour Standards Review Commission recommended that the government reinstate the federal minimum wage and set it based on Statistics Canada's low-income cut-offs. This is not just any agency. The commission recommended that the minimum wage be established so that a person working full time would not be living below the poverty line.

Despite all the admiration that some members of this House have for the Chinese model, I think it is appalling to have to work full time and yet remain below the poverty line. Perhaps if people earned more, they would not need to use food banks at the end of the month.

Canada is a rich country, rich in resources, in brain power and in businesses. No one is going to convince me that we cannot pay full-time employees \$15 an hour.

Job creation is a hot topic in politics these days. However, the government is not creating jobs directly outside the public service. We can encourage job creation by ensuring that our businesses grow and pay their fair share in society. We can also decide that, to set an example, we will now pay federally regulated employees a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. That sets a good example and makes families more stable and happier.

● (1240)

The business community will get that money back because people who earn more will make more purchases.

As a result, I hope that everyone in the House who respects workers will join me in supporting my colleague's motion. In my opinion, it is really just common sense.

This motion deals with a serious problem: the distribution of wealth. The creation of wealth is important, but in my opinion, its redistribution is even more so. Consequently, supporting this motion is an affordable and responsible solution.

Very careful studies have shown that a slight increase in minimum wage does not have a major impact on employment. A moderate and incremental approach will therefore allow companies that do business with the federal government to adapt to this situation.

In terms of other benefits, an increase in the minimum wage can reduce staff turnover and thereby stabilize the operations of companies that do business with the government.

This is clearly important when we consider the fact that 820,000 people worked in federally regulated industries in 2008. Of these employees, over 40,000 were earning less than \$12.49 an hour. These people are not rich. Finally, approximately 100,000 people were earning less than \$15 an hour.

Women and young people are often among those who earn the least. Let us take young people for example. They need money to pay for rising tuition costs. Otherwise, they will accumulate debt that will force them to delay purchasing a home and starting a family. When all is said and done, helping these individuals supports the entire economy. It could even be profitable for the government since these people would pay more taxes.

Business of Supply

The same could be said of women, immigrants and new graduates since the federal minimum wage affects many people who have a lot to offer and who work really hard.

Income inequality is growing at a worrisome rate, and I believe that we must take this crisis seriously. We owe it to our constituents to discuss issues that affect their lives here in the House.

For 35 years, without pause, the income of the top 1% of high earners has been skyrocketing, while the income of the average Canadian household has fallen. Such a significant inequality slows growth because people no longer have the means to stimulate the economy. It also prevents many people from contributing all that they could to our country.

The NDP believes that growth should be real, profitable, sustainable and beneficial to Canadians. In short, we are fighting for growth worthy of the 21st century.

When the gap between the wealthiest and the vast majority of Canadians began to widen in the 1990s and the early 2000s, the Liberal and Conservative governments did nothing to fix the problem. Maybe to them it was not a problem at all.

To the NDP, the growing inequality between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population is a real danger and we want to address it swiftly. That is what we will do in 2015.

I am joining my colleagues in calling on the Conservative government to shoulder its responsibilities towards hardworking Canadians and increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

In closing, I invite the House to admit that it is not just a privilege to represent our constituents, but a responsibility and that comes with its share of duties. Among those duties, we must recognize the seriousness of the problem of the growing gap between the rich and the poor and do something about it.

• (1245)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that the number of Canadians living below the low-income cut-off is now 8.8%. It is the lowest number in Canada's history.

I find it very unusual. Many years ago, when we moved from a federal system to aligning with the provincial system, the NDP supported the change. It talks a good talk, but it actually supported the original change. Then the NDP voted against the working income tax benefit. It voted against the reduction of the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. It voted against pension income splitting for seniors. Now it supports flip-flopping and going back to something that it actually voted to change.

It is going to affect very few people, so if my hon. colleague cares about people on low income, how can she justify to her constituents her vote against all of those very important measures that we introduced, measures that have had a dramatic effect? How can she justify to her constituents voting against things like the working income tax benefit and pension splitting for seniors?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly, 8.8% of the population lives below the poverty line. That number is too high. It should be zero, period. There should not be any poverty in such a wealthy country.

We are often criticized for not voting for certain bills, but why do the Conservatives put everything into omnibus bills? Why do they limit how much time we have to discuss bills?

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the point has been brought up in each of the NDP members' speeches that the Liberals abolished this piece of legislation in 1996. Let us be right on here. They said it had been a while since there had been an increase in federal employees' minimum wage. Yes, the Liberals at that time had been in power for two and a half years and were looking at a way to get the increase. At the time, Audrey McLaughlin and the NDP supported that motion, as did Elsie Wayne, as did Jean Charest. Those are the facts.

Let us have a truthful debate. This very modest measure would help very few, but let us tell the truth to each other.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, the federal minimum wage was abolished in 1996.

Today, I think we must absolutely help people. When I go door to door and meet people, they tell me they are sick of living in poverty. We must help employees under federal jurisdiction. Increasing wages to \$15 an hour in five years is not a lot to ask to eliminate poverty.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Joliette for her very moving and heartfelt speech.

I know about this first-hand in Beauport—Limoilou. The figures from the Direction de santé publique de la Capitale-Nationale show that my riding has a concentration of poverty. When income is too low—whether we are talking employment income or other income—this significantly impedes a person's ability to find a place in society and to find another job.

Could my colleague describe how an increase in the minimum wage could help these people regain their dignity?

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

If we were to increase the minimum wage to \$15, people would be able to regain their dignity, be proud to go to work and not feel as though they are essentially modern-day slaves, when both members of a couple have to work for a measly wage to make ends meet.

If the federal minimum wage were a little higher and the provinces and territories were thus encouraged to increase their own minimum wage, we might have fewer health problems. People would be able to eat better. They could buy fruits and vegetables, which they cannot always do right now. A family cannot buy four apples at \$1.30 a pound.

Business of Supply

I am sure that a better wage would lead to better physical, mental and psychological health and would reduce violence in our society. [English]

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brandon—Souris.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the motion put forward by the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, proposing that the federal minimum wage be raised. For a number of very good reasons already mentioned, I do not support the motion. Not the least of those reasons is the simple fact that since 1996, the federal minimum wage has been paid to the provincial and territorial minimum wage in which the employee is working, so why should we change it now so that employees in the federal jurisdiction can have a higher minimum rate of pay than those in the provincial areas of jurisdiction?

The opposition's argument is that increasing the rate on the federal side will make the provincial governments fall into line and raise their rates to catch up, but the federal government cannot just tell the provincial governments to raise their minimum rates, nor can we be certain that the provinces would follow suit if the federal rate were raised. That is an area of provincial jurisdiction.

Perhaps more important is the fact that the greater expertise in the area, particularly with respect to knowledge and understanding of local and regional conditions, lies with the provincial governments. In fact, provincial governments, for the most part, closely study and analyze the whole range of local and regional issues, including poverty levels, unemployment rates, job opportunities, average wage levels, and so on, before making changes to the minimum wage level.

Hon. members may know that over the past few years all provinces and territories have increased their minimum wage rates, in many cases after reviews by minimum wage boards or independent experts. In fact, several provinces have legislation stating that minimum wages must be reviewed every one or two years. Even those provinces without legislative requirements tend to adjust their minimum wage rates on a regular basis. In fact, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have all announced that they will increase their minimum wage on October 1, 2014. A recent Statistics Canada study has shown that the average growth in the minimum wage across Canada in the past decade has outstripped the rate of inflation.

I also want to point out that increasing minimum wage levels is not the only tool, and not a particularly sharp one, that governments can use to help low-income individuals and families to improve earnings and their standards of living. On the federal government side, these tools include billions of dollars in benefits given to individuals and families every year. I am referring to programs like the Canada child tax benefit; the Canada pension plan; the guaranteed income supplement; the EI program; maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits; the GST/HST credit for those with low incomes, and many more.

I list these few examples just to make the point that there is a great deal more to how we support and protect Canadian workers and families than just a band-aid short-term stunt adjusting the minimum wage. Economic growth and job creation, the top priorities of this

government, are what have helped us build a strong and growing economy. They are what will continue to sustain us in the years ahead. Indeed, we are doing much better in that regard than many of our trading partners.

Since the recession a few years ago, we have had steady job growth, low interest rates, and growth rates that are the envy of many other countries. We believe that getting the economic essentials right will continue to keep us on the right track for even greater levels of prosperity and growth in the years to come.

As we all know, the best way to help improve Canadian workers' income is through the creation of good, well-paying jobs. One good example of how we can make adjustments to improve economic prospects is the recent announcement by the Minister of Finance of the small business job credit. This new credit will effectively lower EI premiums for small businesses by 15% over the next two years. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the credit will create 25,000 person-years of employment.

● (1255)

The minister also confirmed that in 2017, EI premiums would go down from the current \$1.88 per \$100 of earnings to \$1.47 per \$100 of earnings. This is excellent news for both workers and small business employers.

Our government will also continue to make specific changes and adjustments to a variety of programs to support workers and their families. Chief among them is making sure that all workers who come under federal jurisdiction have a safe and healthy workplace, equal opportunity for hiring and advancement, and the right to engage in a fair and balanced bargaining process.

Since being sworn in, our government has steadily increased occupational health and safety protections and improved working conditions for all employees under federal jurisdiction. This government implemented the wage earners protection program that protects the wages, vacation pay, severance pay and termination pay owing to workers whose employers go bankrupt or into receivership. This government brought in the Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act, which changed the Canada Labour Code to ensure employees who lose their jobs cannot be deprived of severance pay just because they happen to be entitled to a pension. This government brought in the Helping Families in Need Act that allows employees under federal jurisdiction to take unpaid leave in many different circumstances to care for their families. It also provides for flexibility for parents who need to interrupt their maternity and paternity leave for different reasons.

All of this is to say that we have offered assistance to low-income Canadians as a topic that is broader and much larger than just a discussion of minimum wage levels. Therefore, I urge all members to consider this and all of the other issues that I have mentioned and vote against the motion.

Business of Supply

●(1300)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I had a chance to spend a few weeks in Australia this summer. I went to restaurants, and lo and behold, there was no tipping. I asked why there was no tipping. They said it was because they pay their people more. I found out this morning from my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek that the minimum wage in Australia is \$17.45 an hour. If this can be done in Australia, where its people are making a half-decent living, why can we not do it here?

My second question involves small business. Would the member not agree that one of the best guarantees to assist small business is to have people in the community who have money to spend? In other words, if we were to increase the minimum wage, the research has shown that most of this money would stay in the communities and that would help guarantee the survival of the small businesses in the small rural communities that I represent. I would like to get his comments on this.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Mr. Speaker, the challenge that we have in a country as large as Canada is the fact that there are regional pockets of economy. The economy of the Atlantic provinces is quite different than the economy that is happening in Alberta. They call it the job “market” for a reason. It is because when there is high demand the wages go up, when there is low demand the wages are lower. That is just because of the demand. Therefore, it would skew the economies of those areas where there are some challenges with the economy and job opportunities. This is why it is important to allow the provinces to make these adjustments, because they understand the dynamics of their regions and can adjust that minimum wage to reflect the actuality of the economy that is in their region.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just heard my colleague opposite's comments that the reason we ought not to establish a national standard for federally regulated industries in terms of minimum wage is that the cost of living and other factors vary depending on where one is in the country. Is he espousing or putting forward the idea that MPs should be paid differently depending on the cost of living in their areas? We are clearly federally regulated, given that we are in the House of Commons. The logical corollary of his argument is that we, as legislators, ought to be paid differently based on the economic reality of the regions we represent. Is that what he is suggesting?

Mr. Colin Mayes: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting prospect.

Quite frankly, if you look at the challenges or even the dynamics in the province of British Columbia, which I am from, it is interesting that the economy of what we call the mainland of Vancouver and Victoria Island areas are quite a bit different than the rural areas of the interior. This is always a challenge that we have in our province.

The fact is that the housing costs in Vancouver and in the mainland are significantly higher than those of the interior. So there are adjustments, and you actually do see the pay levels of a lot of the employees, especially in the private sector, being somewhat lower in the rural area simply because of those contributing factors of the cost of living.

I definitely think it is important that we allow those decisions to be made by the provinces.

●(1305)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I resume debate, I want to remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair rather than directly to their colleagues.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise in the House today to respond to my fellow member's motion and debate the NDP on an actual policy proposal, unlike the third party who, unfortunately, have a habit of talking in platitudes.

The hon. member is asking the House to approve a hike in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. As the NDP knows, the federal minimum wage is pegged to the minimum wage of the province or territory in which the work is carried out. Provinces and territories are best able to assess and respond to the requirements of the local labour markets and establish whatever they deem an appropriate wage. That is why I cannot support this motion.

Allow me to explain why I do not support this motion.

Our government is focused on improving our country's economic prospects and performance. We remain focused on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity and policies that support good, high-paying, quality jobs. Our record of supporting Canadians' economic well-being is the envy of the developed world. We are proud of the over 1.1 million net new jobs that have been added since the worst of the recession, and two-thirds of all jobs created have been in high-wage industries. We have helped over six million youth obtain the skills and experience needed to obtain better jobs.

Under our Conservative government, Canadian families at all income levels have seen increased wages of about 10% in their real after-tax incomes, and the most vulnerable Canadians have seen an increase of 14%. In fact, the number of Canadians living below the low-income cut-off is now at its lowest level ever. Additionally, the low-income rates have improved by 20% for female, single-parent homes.

These are just some of the reasons why I do not support this NDP motion.

Another reason is that the Canadian Labour Code ensures that workers in federally regulated businesses receive a minimum wage that is matched to the provincial or territorial general minimum wage rate where they are employed. The minimum wage is adjusted automatically whenever a province or territory increases its general minimum wage. Our government believes that the provinces and territories are best able to assess and respond to the requirements of their local labour markets and to establish appropriate minimum wage rates.

I commend the member's desire to ensure all Canadians are paid a good wage for the work that they do. The fact is that the proposed solution is merely a band-aid that would help very few Canadians in the short term and would potentially put the jobs of many more Canadians at risk in the longer term.

Business of Supply

If my hon. colleague wants to support higher wages for Canadians, why does he oppose Canada's oil sands, which are providing high-paying unionized jobs for hundreds of thousands of Canadians? If my colleague wants to support higher wages for Canadians, why does he oppose the Keystone pipeline, which will provide high-wage jobs for thousands of Canadians? If my colleague wants to support higher wages, why does he oppose the reforms that the Minister of Employment and Social Development has made to the temporary foreign worker program to put Canadians first?

However, there are many additional reasons why supporting this motion is simply bad public policy.

According to the Department of Labour, there is a growing body of evidence that increasing minimum wages in an abrupt manner could have negative effects on the employment of youth and inexperienced workers, the very people who need work experience to move on to better paying jobs.

Studies suggest that increasing minimum wage rates as a means to reduce poverty is a very blunt tool, which sometimes can hurt the very people it is aimed at helping.

Finally, the focus on minimum wages ignores the fact that they do nothing to help self-employed Canadians or persons who are facing unemployment or underemployment. Our government is focused on long-term fixes, not short-term band-aids.

We recognize the need for all Canadian workers to have jobs that provide them with a good living wage. Jobs paying well over minimum wage are available, with many more to come, and we are continually helping Canadians get them.

Let me discuss the government's skills agenda.

With our current skills shortage in certain regions and sectors, hundreds of thousands of highly paid jobs will be available over the next 10 years for those who have the skills for which employers are looking. Canada is going to need more than one million people in the skilled trades to work on major initiatives in the mining and energy industries. Even if a relatively small fraction of these prospective investments proceed, we are talking about the creation of hundreds of thousands of high-paying, high-quality jobs, primarily in the skilled trades and vocations.

• (1310)

To help Canadians get the skills they need for these jobs, we are investing in the skilled trades through a range of measures.

For example, we are ensuring that apprentices get the financial support they need to complete their training. The apprenticeship incentive grants and the apprenticeship completion grants together provide up to \$4,000 in support to apprentices in a Red Seal trade. In fact, the Government of Canada recently celebrated awarding \$500,000 apprenticeship grants across the country. We also increased measures such as the Canada apprentice loan, which will provide apprentices with interest-free loans of up to \$4,000 to complete their training. We have also made it easier for apprentices to find employment where they can gain on-the-job experience in conjunction with the apprenticeship job creation tax credit for employers.

Another key pillar in our plan to help Canadians get good jobs in the long term is the Canada job grant, an innovative, employer-driven approach to help Canadians gain the skills and training they need to fill available jobs.

We have negotiated these arrangements with provincial and territorial governments to put a greater emphasis on ensuring employers are involved in training decisions. By involving employers in training, we are ensuring people will be trained to get a real job at the end of that training period.

We have now finalized agreements with all of the provinces and territories. Six provinces are now accepting applications from employers with a plan to train people for a job they require. This is a critical step in ensuring employers can find the employees they need to keep our businesses open and growing, and it is a critical step in ensuring Canadians are equipped and prepared for the jobs that are out there.

Through these and other measures our government is working hard to strengthen the labour market, support workers and employers and ensure Canadians have the skills they need to find jobs that provide them with a good standard of living.

This is why I will not be supporting this ill-advised motion that does nothing to help the majority of Canadians get better-paying jobs. Our plan is working, and if New Democrats were serious, they would have supported our budgets that have been improving the lives and livelihood of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it funny when the Conservatives use the argument that we need to respect provincial jurisdictions.

If we have learned anything in recent years, it is that the current Prime Minister will go down in history as the prime minister who never met with his provincial counterparts on any occasion.

The Conservatives are telling us that the provinces and territories are in the best position to set the minimum wage. However, when the time comes to build a pipeline across the country, we are all one country.

People in Newfoundland, British Columbia and back home in Laurentides—Labelle all use the same dollar. Oddly enough, the cost of living is the same when it comes to the basics. The disparity will not disappear on its own. That is wishful thinking, and it is almost as bad as the Liberal leader talking about a budget that balances itself.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, the premise of my hon. colleague is right. We have one Canadian dollar, we are one country, but we also have ten provinces and three territories. His argument goes off the rails when we look at the fact that there is a cost-of-living difference in the different regions of our country, if not, within each of those provinces and territories, as I and my colleague from B.C. pointed out earlier.

I have personal experience in dealing with the Manitoba government. We have looked at opportunities there and made other suggestions besides the minimum wage increases that Manitoba has had. However, to do the leap that New Democrats have looked at to take it to \$15 across Canada, as I said in my discussion and presentation earlier, is a situation where it may provide impacts deleterious to what the member is asking and may impact negatively on the creation of jobs in those communities.

• (1315)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear in the debate on a motion that deals with federal workers and minimum wage the member suggest that the official opposition, and far be it for me to defend my colleagues in the New Democratic Party, opposes the oil sands. I have never heard that. Neither does the Green Party oppose the oil sands or the workers there.

The member for Brandon—Souris went on to ask why the NDP opposed the Keystone pipeline. As a Canadian who opposes the Keystone pipeline because I do not think it is in our economic interest, I am joined in that by the unions that represent the workers in northern Alberta, being Unifor, the former Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union.

There is a real disconnect here when the Conservatives want to believe the Keystone pipeline is somehow good for jobs. The people in northern Alberta know that shipping out raw product is never good for jobs. What is good for jobs is processing it in Alberta.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to was the hundreds of thousands of high-paying and in many cases union jobs that would be available to workers in Canada. We continue to promote the growth of those jobs. I use those as two examples of the impact that could be seen as negative from the implementation of the program proposed here.

However, many of those jobs are high paying already. It is an example of the training we need in our community colleges and universities to have skilled labour to put into those areas. That is why we are looking at the Canada jobs grant and a number of other apprenticeship programs that I outlined to improve the ability to have people who can work in those fields.

These are only two major job areas that I mentioned. There are many others. I would urge my colleagues to come on side for the development of many of those projects because they will positively impact on the Canadian economy and the potential for high-paying jobs for many of our sons and daughters in our country.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

First of all, let me say how excited I am to be back here in the House and dealing with a critical issue in our very first opposition day motion. We are trying to address income inequality, which has grown in a way that is unacceptable in Canada.

Right now, in Canada, the top 10% own over 50% of the wealth, yet we have the fastest-growing poor. A very high number of young people are living well below the poverty line. A lot of women are living below the poverty line. I come from a province where child poverty is very high, unacceptably high.

In a country like Canada, child poverty is totally unacceptable. No matter what political stripes members wear, every person in this room should be committed to reducing the gap between the rich and the poor and to raising the income level of those living well below the poverty line.

That is what this motion does. It is not rocket science. I keep hearing people say that it only affects a few. Whether it affects 40,000 or 100,000, and I think the number is closer to 100,000, for those workers it will make a great deal of difference when they go grocery shopping or have to pay their rent. It is going to make a great deal of difference to young workers as well as to children, because they will not be struggling in the same way they are now.

In my province of British Columbia, the minimum wage at the moment sits at just over \$10. Let us just think about it. Even if people were to work 40 hours a week, the amount they would end up with annually would still have them living below the poverty line, and most of those people are working hard.

I have heard from my constituents in Newton—North Delta that many of them—hard-working people living in Canada, both citizens and permanent residents—are having to work two full-time jobs, or the equivalent thereof, in order to try to make ends meet. I have met with mothers who told me what it is like to see their children only for a very short time, because in order to feed their children they have to go out and work that second job.

When we know that the price of housing is where it is, all over Canada and specifically in the Lower Mainland, we can imagine that many of these people are spending a lot of their income on basic housing.

I have some statistics from Surrey. The national household survey showed that over 15% of people in Surrey are categorized as low income. Almost 19% of children living in Surrey are living in low-income households. One in three Surrey renters spends well over 30% of their income on rent.

This move by the NDP is not going to make the sky fall. Listening to some of my colleagues across the way, people would think that the sky is going to fall and all the jobs are going to leave Canada. I will tell members that with close to 350,000 temporary foreign workers here, the Conservative government has done more to give away jobs than people living in Canada should be doing than has happened at any other time.

Business of Supply

I was in Edmonton last week, which is not exactly a hotbed of socialism, and I met with skilled workers. Fully qualified iron workers, boilermakers, and many other skilled trade workers cannot get jobs. They are seeing those jobs being filled by workers who have been brought in, and they are not always being paid the same wages.

Let us see who the federal minimum wage is going to impact.

• (1320)

It would apply to federally regulated sectors, such as railways, transport, banks and financial services, and telecommunications. I know many people in my riding who are working in the telecommunications sector, and they are not making \$15 an hour, no matter what somebody tries to tell us. It would also affect people working in broadcasting, and so on.

I know the Conservative government has an allergy. It has an allergy to science. It has an allergy to evidence-based decision-making, and it definitely does not like to listen to experts. Even when staff within the bureaucracy, within government, are giving it advice, it often likes to look the other way.

The government's own federal labour standards review in 2006 recommended that the federal government reinstate the federal minimum wage and benchmark it to Statistics Canada's low-income cut-offs. That recommendation is very reasonable. It comes from people who have knowledge and who are experts in this area in many ways. The review also proposed that the wage should be set at a level to ensure that no one who works full time would end up living below the poverty line.

We hear a lot of rhetoric in this room. We often hear that the sky is falling, but every person living in Canada has a right, a reasonable expectation that if they are working about 40 hours a week, they should not be living below the poverty line. That is just not good for us, either socially or in relation to mental health or in relation to the impact on families.

I urge my colleagues to support this motion. New Democrats believe that Canadians who work hard and play by the rules should be able to make a decent living. We are not talking about raising their wages to \$50 an hour. We are not talking about enabling people to drive a Mercedes-Benz. We are talking about raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

As motions come up, we do a little bit of research. I found that over the last 40 years, the average minimum wage has only received a one-cent raise, even though our economy grew significantly. That is one cent, and I mean that in real terms, when we look at the cost of living and everything else. Again, that is one cent over 40 years, yet the number of people who have grown their wealth and the huge tax relief to corporations have taken a great deal of money out of the economy as well.

Once again, is this motion reasonable? Absolutely.

As I was in my riding, as I am sure everyone else was, going door to door and meeting with constituents, even the people who make a decent living and the people in the business community were very concerned about labour instability and how people are not sticking with a job. Many of them, when we talked to them about the

minimum wage, did a lot of head-nodding. When we think about it, it is because they live in those communities and they know that it is not possible to survive in a reasonable way on less than that \$15 an hour. Many of our minimum wage workers in B.C., as I said, are at \$10.25, and that is just not good.

Others will say we should just leave it all to the provinces, but there is a jurisprudence. There are provincial and federal areas. What we are talking about here are federal and federally regulated workplaces or areas, and that is why telecommunications is included in this measure. Saying that it is only going to impact fewer than 100,000 people is not a reason to say that we should not do it. That is the most asinine reasoning that I have heard since I have been in this House.

I would urge everybody to support this motion.

• (1325)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that NDP members supported moving to the system that we have now and as well are acknowledging that only a few people would be affected.

Obviously every person is important. Things like providing the working income tax benefit, splitting pension plans for seniors, and lowering the GST had an impact on all Canadians. NDP members flip, they flop, they support aligning it with the provinces, they do not support it, and this is a new position.

More importantly, I would like to understand the analysis they did, because with every benefit there might be, there are also negatives, and those have been clearly identified in the research.

What impact is this going to have on youth and the youth unemployment rate in this country? We know there will be some impact, so if we are going to have a full debate, apart from the fact that New Democrats do not support the measures that will have the most impact, what would be the impact on youth and youth unemployment of the measure that they are proposing today?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, there is quite a bit of research out there. As I said earlier, the government's own federal labour standards review in 2006 recommended that the government reinstate the federal minimum wage review. There is also very strong empirical evidence that increasing the minimum wage decreases income inequality. Surely my colleagues across the way want to support that—not.

There is also robust literature indicating that modest increases in the minimum wage have no meaningful impact on employment and also help to improve our social fabric.

Business of Supply

I am getting tired of hearing that it only affects a few. When we look at percentages, maybe it looks like a few, but when we are looking at close to 100,000 workers, surely at that stage it is worth it. If it is not that big a deal and only affects 100 workers, as I heard someone mumbling, then I would say that even for that it is worth it. I do not know why the sky-is-falling argument is being used by the other side.

Once again, maybe we should all stop and think to see what our lives would look like if we made \$12 an hour.

• (1330)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to my colleague's point, the two-year study that was done by Harry Arthurs and presented to the government in 2006 said that going back to the federal minimum wage would provide some benefit, although it would be marginal.

However, the purpose of debate in the House is to get a better understanding for the people watching at home and for those who take part in the debate. We want to learn as much as we can, and it has been identified on a number of occasions here that Statistics Canada's own number in 2010 identified that this measure would have an impact on fewer than 416 workers within the federal jurisdiction. That is a statistic that anyone can look up.

I am asking for some guidance. "Help me help you, Jerry Maguire." Where is the NDP getting the figure of 100,000? Could the member at least refer to the study that shows it would help 100,000 people?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question and the passion inflected in that question.

We are not talking only about employees of the federal government. We are also talking about the federally regulated section. When we look at the telecommunication, broadcasting, and banking and financial services that come under this measure, we can see the numbers there already. We will get the exact note to the member if that is what he requires.

My understanding is that these numbers go anywhere from 40,000-plus to close to 100,000. However, even if it is 500 or 400, I would ask everyone to support this motion. The sky is not going to fall, but it will—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to this motion on the minimum wage.

People who know me know that I have a lot of experience in labour relations, negotiations and all those sorts of things. I was also a member of a committee set up by the New Brunswick government to study the minimum wage.

I would like to respond right away to the member for Cape Breton—Canso. He rose and asked where the NDP members were in 1996, and he mentioned that they voted with the Liberals. The story there is that in 1996, the federal minimum wage was \$4 an hour. It was higher in all the provinces. The federal government was lagging behind. Rather than keeping its minimum wage at \$4 an hour and

introducing a bill to make the federal minimum wage higher than that of all the provinces and thereby showing leadership to workers by ensuring that they would be treated well, it decided to do what the provinces were doing. The federal government would apply the provinces' minimum wage, which at the time was higher than the federal wage. It was a winning formula. To put it bluntly, it was better than nothing.

If we look at the situation between 1996 and the present, I think that that had a negative effect. The federal government should have come up with a formula to increase the minimum wage in order to set an example for the rest of the provinces and show respect for workers. Instead, the federal government said that it was not generous, that it would align itself with the provinces and do as they did.

The problem is that companies under federal jurisdiction act in the following manner. Instead of creating jobs in their province, they move from one province to another, wherever the minimum wage is the lowest. They want to exploit workers in Canada. This does not just happen in the third world; it also happens here in Canada.

I will come back to this issue because, back in New Brunswick, I was part of the team advising the minister on the minimum wage. I remember I went before the committee saying that they should raise the minimum wage in New Brunswick by \$1. I remember that the rest of the committee said that it would not work like that. The minister was prepared to raise the hourly wage by 25¢. Had the recommendation not been for 25¢, there would have been no increase. I for one was not there to say what the minister wanted to hear; I was there to advise him that the increase should be \$1 instead of 25¢. That was my position on the issue.

These wages resemble slavery. Today, people have minimum wage jobs. Most of these people are women and they need to have one, two or three jobs. I am sure that the people back home understand what I am saying because that is what they tell me in their community. There is not a member here, in the House of Commons, who can tell me that, when they met with their constituents, they were told that the minimum wage was too high. Not a single member, whether Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Bloc, Green Party or whichever other party, went to their constituency and met with workers who said that the minimum wage was too high and needed to be cut. It is quite the opposite.

The cost of living has gone up. The increases to the minimum wage have led to a completely unacceptable level of poverty. That is why I say that the federal government has a responsibility to show leadership and set a minimum wage that is higher than that of any of the provinces.

• (1335)

It has to step up and tell the provinces that this is unacceptable.

New Brunswickers are not second-class Canadians. Our minimum wage should not be lower than Ontario's, which is \$11 per hour. People in New Brunswick work just as hard as people elsewhere in the country. They can do the same work, so they deserve to have the same minimum wage. Just because people are from the Maritimes does not mean they should be the poorest people in the country.

Business of Supply

The government has an opportunity to show leadership. The NDP wants to take the lead so it can help workers. I have never seen the Conservatives come to the House of Commons with a bill to protect working men and women. Quite the contrary. They pass bills to kill unions and undermine workers' strength. That is what the government is doing.

When the time comes to vote on minimum wage, I hope they will take the workers' side for once. That is something they have never done since coming to power in 2006. They would rather talk about how the NDP voted against their budgets and how they wanted to lower the GST from 7% to 5%.

When we suggest raising workers' wages, they say no right away. They would not touch that with a 10-foot pole. They legislated Canada Post and Air Canada employees back to work. They introduce private members' bills to get rid of unions, the very unions that worked so hard to negotiate pay increases, pension funds and health care for workers. The Conservatives are working against that.

For once, they have the opportunity to stand up and say that the federal government will establish a federal minimum wage. It is not normal for a federal government not to have a minimum wage set in its legislation. The reason the previous federal Liberal government got rid of it is that the government did not have the courage to increase the minimum wage. Instead it shifted the responsibility to the provinces. It is too bad, but that was not the right move.

Under the current circumstances, the right thing for the government to do for workers would be to show leadership and prove that it is taking care of them. These men and women get up in the morning and work hard to build our country. It takes more than money. They need money to feed their families and we owe them respect.

As legislators, out of respect for the workers, we must legislate an increase in their salaries to ensure they are not being left in poverty as it is happening now.

I would like to see a Conservative stand up and deny the fact that there are workers living below the poverty line because of minimum wages. They are forced to take on two or three jobs. These men and women have to work for one employer in the morning, another in the afternoon and a third one on the weekend.

That is what the people of Acadie—Bathurst back home tell me. I challenge anyone here to stand up and tell me it is not true that workers are living below the poverty line. For example, fish plant workers earn minimum wage their entire lives instead of a decent salary.

I am proud of this motion and I hope the other political parties are too. If they vote against it, their true colours will show, as they did during the vote on the cuts to employment insurance.

The Liberals took \$57 billion from the EI fund and the Conservatives made it legal to steal from the EI fund. Today, they are still not prepared to support workers. It is not right. Out of respect for the men and women who have built this country and continue to do so, we have a responsibility to legislate in order to provide them the best working conditions, not take them away.

● (1340)

This motion gives us the chance to do that. It gives us the chance to show national leadership, across the country, and show what Canada is made of and what we want to do. This will then give the provinces the chance to follow suit.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am proud of the record of our government in terms of what we have done for people across this country, whether it is seniors and income splitting, the working income tax benefit, the biggest increase to GIS in many years, or the universal child care benefit. We have a record of achieving results. We now have the lowest level of people living below the poverty line, 8.8%. That is an amazing record. The NDP has voted against all of those measures.

The New Democrats have also said that the provinces were doing a good job so they would vote to switch to the minimum wage of the provinces and then decided to switch back. Then they are having conversations with respect to the enormous cost of living in Vancouver, as one member mentioned, and another member from New Brunswick indicated that they want to cover the cost of living, and they are recognizing that the cost of living is very different across this country.

I would again ask the hon. member this. The provinces are in a good position. There are many experts who suggest we would be better off to have micro-regions within the provinces rather than having a very blunt instrument to achieve the results the NDP is trying to achieve.

● (1345)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I had a hard time understanding and accepting what the member said her government has done. It is the same government that talked about the \$100 for child care. After people do their income tax they have to report that as income and have to pay it back, so I do not know where the \$100 is.

It is the same government that went against the right to refuse work when we worked so hard to have that law put into place across the country. That is the government. She is the same person who got up as a member of the government to justify how they could remove the right to refuse unsafe work. I remember that, and members could go to the blues and read in her speech how abusive they were of that. The government believes only that workers are a bunch of abusers and that it had to do that. It is the same government that legislated the postal workers back to work. It is the same government that legislated Air Canada workers back to work.

I do not know if members remember, but every time the Conservatives got up in this House it was always to hurt the men and women who work hard in this country. That is what they have done. What we want to do with this motion is make sure we have a place for the workers and respect that with a minimum wage that makes a bit of sense.

Business of Supply

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of my favourite times in the House is when I get to join in the debate with my friend and colleague from Acadie—Bathurst.

Let us be careful here. I had two calls in the office today, and I think my colleague will want to make sure the record is correct. Do not get me wrong: he did not mislead the House in any way with respect to this. He made reference to the fish plant workers and having respect for those fish plant workers who work for minimum wage, just as I have respect, as does anybody who lives in a coastal community where there is fishing. However, members must know that this motion would not impact anybody outside of the federal jurisdiction; so perhaps he could clarify that.

I will go back and ask my other colleague this. I know where I got the statistic of 416 people. That was from the StatsCan study. I still do not know where the NDP are getting this 100,000 workers that it would impact. If the member could enlighten me, I would appreciate that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the fish plant workers are not in the jurisdiction of the federal government, and we all know that. However, what I said was that, if we had the leadership of the federal government with respect to minimum wage, it would have an impact across the country in every province. I used the example of people working in the fish plants to show that, if the federal government would take leadership on the minimum wage, it would encourage the provinces to do it also. That is what I said. I surely did not mislead.

With respect to the other question of the 100,000 workers, that is not people who are working for the government. We have all kinds of people who are working in different jurisdictions across the country in the federal government, who are under the \$15 minimum wage. That should be corrected through this motion.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the motion put forward by the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie to reinstate the federal minimum wage and increase it to \$15 per hour over five years.

Changing the way minimum wages are established for federally regulated employees in Canada is simply unnecessary, which is why I cannot support the motion today. First, allow me to explain how minimum wages are set.

Currently, employees in federally regulated enterprises are entitled to the general minimum wage of the province or territory in which they are employed. This has been the case since 1996 when minimum wages were pegged to match the general minimum wage rate of the province or territory in which the federally regulated worker is usually employed. Although some may have forgotten this, this measure significantly improved protection for federally regulated employees. Prior to 1996, these employees were entitled to the lowest minimum wage rate in Canada, a measly \$4 an hour compared to an average of about \$6 an hour in provinces and territories at the time.

Workers in federally regulated companies are employed in industries such as banking, transportation, telecommunications, shipping, postal services, and uranium mining. Generally speaking, these are not low-wage workers. Most of the jobs in these industries already pay well above the minimum wage.

In 2008 the federal jurisdiction workplace survey found that only 416 employees, or 0.05% of all employees in the federal jurisdiction, were earning just the legal minimum wage, which was on average less than \$8.50 per hour at the time. Only about 1% earned less than \$10 an hour.

Since then minimum wages have increased in all provinces and territories. Four provinces, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador have announced that they will increase their minimum wage on October 1, 2014. Not only that, but Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Yukon index their minimum wage annually to adjust for increases to the cost of living. Ontario has also announced that it will establish an indexing mechanism.

Why is the federal minimum wage pegged to the provincial and territorial minimum wages? The provinces and territories are in the best position to assess and respond to the requirements of their local labour markets. As I am sure members of the House are aware, the cost of living varies by province, territory and region. That is a key consideration when establishing minimum wages. We believe that provincial and territorial governments can better assess local needs.

In the last four years all provinces and territories have increased their minimum wage. To give members an idea, currently the lowest general minimum wage rate provided in four jurisdictions is set at \$10 an hour. At the high end of the scale are Ontario and Nunavut where most employees must be paid at least \$11 an hour. The other jurisdictions fall in between.

Our government wants all Canadians to prosper, not just those in the federal jurisdiction, and the best way to do that is through a strong economy. That is why the Minister of Finance recently announced a reduction in EI premiums that will leave more money in the pockets of small businesses and enable them to strengthen their businesses and the economy. The minister also confirmed that in 2017, EI premiums will go down from the current \$1.88 per \$100 of earnings to \$1.47 per \$100 of earnings. This will deduct less money from employees' pay cheques, leaving more money in their pockets.

In the federal jurisdiction we are working to ensure that workplaces are fair, safe and productive. With that goal in mind we have taken steps to improve labour standard protections for employees. There is also the wage earner protection program. This program protects the wages, vacation pay, severance pay and termination pay owed to workers whose employers go bankrupt or into receivership—

• (1350)

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I just want to be advised on how much time is left in the member's allotted time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): If the member wishes to know how much time is left for the speech, I would suggest that he approach the Table or the Chair directly, rather than rising on a point of order. It is not a point of order. At this point the member has not split his time, so there is 15 minutes remaining for his speech.

Statements by Members

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, on that note I will ask to split my time with the member for Mississauga—Streetsville and I apologize to the Chair for not indicating that at an earlier point.

The earlier speaker from across the aisle was talking about our government having done nothing for workers. The wage earner protection program protects the wages, vacation pay, severance pay and termination pay owed to workers if their employers go bankrupt or into receivership. This has benefited thousands of Canadians. The statistics are this. Since its inception in 2008 and up to July 31, 2014, more than 74,000 Canadians have received \$174.8 million in WEP payments. This is the wage earner protection program that our government brought in as legislation, contradicting what was said earlier by the previous speaker. These are wages that are owed to employees by employers who became bankrupt or went into receivership.

To further support employees in the federal jurisdiction we implemented the Helping Families in Need Act. This gives employees the right to take unpaid leave if they have a child who is critically ill, is missing, or has passed away as a result of a probable criminal offence. It is clear that in recent years we have expanded the labour standard protections for all employees in federally regulated enterprises because we have their best interests at heart.

The question of reinstating a federal minimum wage is a moot point. Establishing the minimum wage lies in the capable hands of our provincial and territorial governments who are better positioned to apply a local lens to such policy decisions. Workers in the federal jurisdiction are getting a fair wage under a system that works. There is simply no reason to change it. Therefore, that is why I propose to defeat the motion and I ask the support of my fellow members.

• (1355)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across for his discourse because he put it in better terms than the Minister of Labour. The minister said there are only 400 people who would be affected by this. My colleague, quite correctly, pointed out that the study showed that there would be many people affected by it because, although there are only 400 at the \$8 minimum, there were 40,000 at that time who were in the \$12 range. Wage inflation has not been that much in the last six years that those under \$12 an hour would not be impacted by a minimum wage of \$15. That is simple math.

I would like to hear from my colleague across the way, who seems to have a better grasp on this situation and wants to give a more truthful story than the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, the real pertinent facts and the truth is that provinces and territories currently have standards in place that protect workers who are in the federal jurisdiction where they work.

Frankly, as was stated early in my remarks, these jobs in general are very well-paid jobs. These are government jobs. Most people know, at least in my community, that a government job entails a lot more benefit and wage than the typical private enterprise. In my lifetime, owning my own business, I know I could not afford to match those standards so I had employees leave me for a government job.

My comments in no way contradict the statistics. The statistics are what they are. That is what I presented. The provinces and the territories are the ones to have jurisdiction over this matter.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, previous to my colleague giving his speech we heard from the member for Acadie—Bathurst. He talked about how he thought the government was not taking good care of workers in this country. I would like my colleague to talk further about some of those measures that we have introduced that really have strong, positive impact and support for workers. He mentioned a few but I would like him to have an opportunity to talk more about those.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, the Helping Families in Need Act is aimed directly at families who are faced with critical life-changing circumstances in their lives. Our government recognized this. Our government came in with the families in need act and extended the ability for employees in the workforce today to deal with that situation by being able to leave their place of employment and not be fired or laid off as a result of that. That is one key, very important piece of our government's platform for the most vulnerable people in this country.

The second one, the wage earner protection program, protects workers from bankruptcies of companies that go bankrupt and do not have the funds to pay workers their severance, their vacation pay, or any back wages that were not paid. It was our government that brought this bill to the House of Commons, our government that passed it, whilst the opposition voted against it.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

BURUNDI

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to express the legitimate concerns of the people of my riding who are of Burundian origin.

Burundi's history has unfortunately been marked by several inter-ethnic massacres. A peace process, which was supported by Canada, led to the Arusha agreements in 2000 and a political transition in 2005.

In that context, in 2014, the Parliament of Burundi passed legislation to create a truth and reconciliation commission. However, some people have concerns about the process for appointing commissioners and the possible absence of international participants and human right observers.

I would also like to invite the Canadian government to provide Burundi with some expertise and support in the creation of that commission, so that it may lead to lasting peace.

The children of Burundi deserve a better future.

Statements by Members

[English]

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as municipal elections in British Columbia are soon upon us, I would like to take the opportunity to thank four outstanding individuals who will not be seeking re-election.

Christina Benty was elected mayor of Golden in 2008, and Dee Conklin was elected mayor of Radium Hot Springs in 2008 as well. Both of these women have moved their communities forward in a positive way.

Heath Slee was first elected in 2002 as the Area B director for the RDEK. His accomplishments are many. However, the most significant was being president of UBCM for the year 2011-12.

John Kettle was elected in 2002 as the Area B director for the RDCK. Since 2008, he has served as the chair of the RDCK as well as the chair of the East Kootenay hospital board.

These four individuals are passionate about politics, and I am honoured to have worked with them over the years. I wish each of them well and thank them for their years of service. They have served their communities well.

* * *

CONFLICT MINERALS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more than five million people have died as a result of the war in the Congo. The conflict is fueled and funded by minerals we use in our cell phones, computers, jet engines, and jewellery. If we stop buying these minerals from armed groups in the Congo, we can end the war, just like we did with blood diamonds. That is why I proposed Bill C-486, the conflict minerals act, now approaching a vote at second reading. That is why thousands of Canadians have signed petitions and written letters to me and other parliamentarians supporting this bill. That is why a grassroots network has developed on the issue, bringing together human rights advocates, student groups, and environmental organizations.

Tomorrow night, for 486 minutes, Canadians across the country will take part in a national day of action for this Just Minerals campaign by turning off their cell phones to show solidarity and create awareness. I invite all members and all Canadians to join in this action tomorrow night. Together, let us take conflict out of Canadian homes.

* * *

NEW BRUNSWICK ELECTION

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to draw the attention of my colleagues to the importance of the opportunities that lay ahead for Saint John and New Brunswick.

There has been a lot of progress made in the last few years, whether it is moving forward with local projects, such as resolving the long-outstanding water treatment issue in the city of Saint John, or building a new YMCA, or removing the tolls and refurbishing the Saint John Harbour Bridge. The co-operation between the three

levels of government has been refreshing for my constituents, and the results speak volumes.

I know that many are aware of the huge potential that will come with the energy east pipeline and the development of our natural resources, but even as the future looks so promising, it is surely not guaranteed. The people of our province have a decision to make. We can accept not developing our natural resources, or we can take steps toward prosperity. We can continue to depend on support from outside of our province, or we can stand on our own. The decision belongs to New Brunswick, and the answer on September 22 is to simply say yes.

* * *

AGINCOURT JUNIOR PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to congratulate Agincourt Junior Public School on its 100th anniversary. The school is an important architectural landmark in Agincourt. It has been a fixture in the community going back many years, since 1914, when it first opened.

At that time, Agincourt was just a small rural village, and the school consisted of just four classrooms. Today I am proud to say that this small village has grown into a large city with a diverse cultural community. The school now encompasses eight classrooms, a library resource centre, and two portables.

Agincourt Junior Public School has successfully and continuously met the needs of our dynamic community and today comprises approximately 230 students representing many different language groups and cultures. I would like to extend my personal best wishes to the school, its staff, and students on this important milestone and wish them much success in future years.

* * *

●(1405)

ARTHRITIS RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what disease afflicts 4.6 million Canadians? Arthritis. What disease afflicts proportionately more women than men? Arthritis. What illness will be suffered by one in five Canadians within just seven years? Arthritis and its related autoimmune conditions.

Already the economic burden of arthritis in Canada is \$6.4 billion every year. We must act.

Canada is poised to launch an exciting chapter in the global fight to beat arthritis. With innovative research into women's arthritis, cutting-edge imaging technology, and world-leading rheumatoid arthritis research, Canada's Arthritis Research Foundation is leading the way to a better future.

Kudos to the Arthritis Research Foundation and its supporters, and kudos to the Arthritis Society that works quietly to support Canadian arthritis sufferers.

*Statements by Members***CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Museum of Human Rights is the first museum in the world dedicated solely to the evolution, celebration, and promotion of human rights.

This magnificent building, designed by architect Antoine Predock, stands as the manifestation of the vision and profound generosity of Izzy Asper, whose dream of a better world will now be his permanent legacy and will serve as a daily reminder of the values that guide and underpin Canadian society: equality, tolerance, inclusion, and, yes, the inalienable human rights of all the people of the world.

It is a reflection of the incredible community support for Izzy Asper's dream that this museum has raised more donations than all other museums in the country combined in their entire histories.

Today, on behalf of the grateful people of Winnipeg, I recognize and pay tribute to the Asper family, the Friends of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights and its many generous donors, the skilled tradesmen who executed this architectural triumph, and the Government of Canada, which saw fit to sponsor the first national museum outside the capital region.

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ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House about the unveiling of the Royal Canadian Air Force World War II memorial in my constituency of Brandon—Souris.

Last week, veterans and community members alike gathered on the grounds of the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum to partake in the solemn ceremony that paid tribute to the over 19,000 airmen and airwomen who died while in service to the Commonwealth during World War II. They answered the call on behalf of our nation when we needed them most. They brought glory to themselves and Canada while fighting to make this world a better place. Now their names, etched in granite, will stand as a lasting reminder of their sacrifice for their country.

I also want to highlight and thank all the volunteers and donors who made this memorial possible. In particular, I want to pay tribute to Archie Londry, the memorial chair and visionary of the project and honorary fundraising chair, Reg Forbes.

Now, together and forever more, everyone who visits the RCAF memorial will remember our nation's heroes of the skies.

* * *

BURLINGTON FLOOD RELIEF

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on August 4, parts of the city of Burlington received 191 millimetres of rain in just a few hours. This is almost double the amount of rain Hurricane Hazel dumped on the city many decades ago. Over 3,000 homes were flooded with either rainwater or sewage, including my own basement. Many of the victims of the flood had little or no insurance to cover this type of disaster.

The outreach by neighbours to those affected by the flood has been overwhelming. Their generous support has come in all forms, from food and clothing to toys for children; from financial donations at public events to opening homes for the use of laundry facilities.

We do live in a caring community, but there is more to do. The Burlington Community Foundation has set a goal of raising \$2 million dollars to help flood victims in the most need. This fund may be matched by the Ontario disaster relief fund. I ask the residents of Burlington to continue to come together to support the BCF flood relief program.

I thank the residents of Burlington for the caring and compassion they have shown for their neighbours.

* * *

●(1410)

[Translation]

UKRAINE

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation in the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk is a challenge for the western world. Even so, the friendship between Canada and Ukraine remains steadfast. Canada fully supports the Ukrainian people's desire for peace and democracy.

On behalf of all my colleagues, I would like to extend a warm welcome to President Poroshenko, who is visiting our great country for the first time.

[Member spoke in Ukrainian.]

* * *

[English]

UKRAINE

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, will visit Canada tomorrow. He will be warmly greeted by Canadians and in particular by those of Ukrainian heritage, as he will address all of Canada from this House.

What President Poroshenko will find is that Canadians stand alongside the Ukrainian people in support of the right to freedom and self-determination, free from the intimidation of Vladimir Putin.

Yesterday our Prime Minister reminded Canadians that since the Putin regime invaded Ukraine, Canada has led the way in seeking the political and economic isolation of Russia. There is no ambiguity as to where Canada stands. We will never recognize the illegal occupation of Crimea or any other inch of Ukraine's sovereign territory. In support of Ukraine, we have sent financial assistance, military supplies, and our armed forces to reassure our NATO allies in eastern Europe.

Statements by Members

Canada is a loyal friend and recognizes that Ukrainian immigrants helped build and shape our nation. Canada will work hard to ensure that we help Ukraine build a new future and become prosperous as only free and democratic societies can.

Slava Ukraini.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CELEBRATION OF THE SAINT-FRANÇOIS BROTHERHOOD

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 14, hundreds of people gathered for the 7th annual celebration of the Fraternité de Saint-François in the Saint-Noël-Chabanel parish in my riding.

Residents eagerly await this annual celebration that brings together the many cultural communities in the eastern part of Laval.

Over 40 countries were represented during the parade of flags. The event also included music, a talent show, booths for artisans and local organizations, and the blessing of school backpacks.

Many people worked hard to make this event possible. I would like to thank Father Gérald Dionne, the Fabre council of the Knights of Columbus and the entire organizing committee. Your dedication makes the celebration of the Fraternité de Saint-François a huge success every year.

In Saint-François, our diversity is part of our wealth. Let us continue to celebrate it and show our pride in it every day.

* * *

[*English*]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal leader, who would reverse seniors' pension income splitting and believes that supporting the NDP's federal minimum wage proposal is relief for middle-class Canadians, our Conservative government helps Canadians keep more of their hard-earned dollars.

Unlike the Liberal leader's proposals, we have taken real action to put more money back into the pockets of seniors and all other Canadians by cutting the GST; introducing pension income-splitting; creating tax free savings accounts, allowing more than nine million Canadians to save tax-free; and introducing the pooled registered pension plan to help small businesses and the self-employed save for their retirements.

However, we are not stopping there. We recently announced the small business hiring credit, which will lower EI payroll taxes and save small businesses over \$550 million, and there is a further rate cut planned for 2017, bringing rates down by a total of 22% compared to 2014 levels.

We continue to stand up for seniors and small business owners, while the Liberal leader's proposals show that he is clearly in over his head.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking the people of Trinity—Spadina for granting me the privilege of serving them in the House of Commons. They have sent me here with a clear mandate to fight for a national housing program. In particular, they want co-op housing programs protected. This program is an internationally celebrated and respected housing strategy. However, as CMHC mortgage agreements expire, not only are co-op housing communities being plunged into a made-in-Ottawa housing crisis but at the same time, the federal program that provides subsidies to lower-income co-op residents is being eliminated.

At a very real, human level, this means that seniors who have lived in co-ops for years, paying market rents, who have invested volunteer hours building these communities, seniors who depend on rent subsidies as they hit retirement age and go on fixed incomes, now risk being evicted because the subsidy program is disappearing.

The Co-op Housing Federation of Toronto and Canada is calling on the government to re-assert its responsibility in this area, to renew the mortgage agreements, and to continue to provide rent-geared-to-income subsidies for co-ops.

We should be building housing, not getting rid of it. We should be supporting Canadians, not deserting them.

* * *

● (1415)

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Liberals are in over their heads on matters of national security. We now know that the Liberal leader went pandering for votes at a radical fundamentalist mosque that has recruited people for al Qaeda. We also know that the Liberal leader opposes taking passports from individuals who have gone overseas to engage in acts of terrorism, saying that stripping passports is an affront to Canadian values.

Yesterday the member for Kingston and the Islands went even further than his deeply out-of-touch leader when he took to Twitter to say that Liberals see light and beauty inside every person.

First the Liberals refuse to condemn female genital mutilation as a barbaric practice, and now they see light and beauty where the rest of the world sees evil, particularly in the face of three western journalists being barbarically beheaded. Can the leader of the Liberal Party point to any barbaric evil group or practice he is actually opposed to?

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP stands up for workers. That is why the first motion put forward by the NDP this session is to raise the minimum wage federally to \$15 an hour. This will mean money in the pockets of many thousands of Canadians who work in industries like transport, banking and communications.

The Liberals removed the federal minimum wage in the 1990s and workers face continued uncertainty. As Jerry Dias, head of Unifor, said:

Too many workers today are forced into low-paid, part-time and precarious jobs. The kind of leadership [the Leader of the Opposition] is showing on this issue will help improve their situation.

The Prime Minister's only solution to this is just to shrug his shoulders, but this is a chance for the federal government to really show leadership and set an example by increasing standards for workers in all jurisdictions right across the country.

The time for leadership is now.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unsurprisingly, the Liberal leader spent his summer avoiding answering the tough questions. While Canadians count on our Prime Minister's strong leadership to protect our democracy and freedom, the leader of the third party continues to count China's basic dictatorship as his favourite government.

While our party works hard and makes tough decisions to bring Canadians a balanced budget next year to deliver hard-working families further tax cuts, the Liberal leader tries to tell Canadians that the budget will somehow magically balance itself. Maybe by making marijuana legal and available for sale in stores, just like alcohol and cigarettes, none of us will need to be concerned about how budgets actually work. We just need to trust the expertise of the Liberals' top economic adviser, the Prince of Pot.

All of this does not just show poor judgment; it shows a leader in over his head. That is why Canadians know we are better off with this Prime Minister.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister said that there are currently several dozen Canadian soldiers in Iraq. The Prime Minister knows the exact number. On an issue as important as Iraq, Canadians deserve their Prime Minister to be completely open and honest with them. I am going to ask him the same question as I did yesterday, but this time I expect a real answer. How many members of the Canadian Forces will be sent to Iraq?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I checked with the Chief of the Defence Staff, and the number of soldiers we are in the process of deploying is 69.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the same person who, in 2003, wanted Canada to be involved in Iraq. He is finally getting his wish.

However, in 2006, the Prime Minister promised to “make Parliament responsible for the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations”, no exceptions. In 2007, he said, “any future military deployment must be supported by a majority of parliamentarians”, no conditions: all foreign operations, any future deployment, not just combat missions.

The Prime Minister promised a vote on all future military deployment. Why is the Prime Minister breaking his word?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the government's position on that over the past eight years has been very consistent.

However, I would point out that when the Leader of the Opposition makes the comparison between what the United States is doing today and what the United States did in 2003, there is no comparison.

President Obama was very opposed to the 2003 war. Obviously today he is launching a counterterrorism operation, not simply because millions of people in that region are in danger, but because there are very real threats that present themselves to all countries, including both the United States and Canada.

We are very fortunate that we have men and women in uniform who are prepared to undertake these missions to protect us.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice for the Prime Minister to reference another NATO leader. The fact is that it was he who promised Canadians a vote and a debate in Parliament, no one else.

[Translation]

According to RCMP documentation, the Prime Minister knew that his chief of staff, Nigel Wright, personally assisted Mike Duffy in repaying his expenses.

The Prime Minister still has not explained what he really knew about this personal assistance. If he is called to testify in the trial of his senator, Mike Duffy, will the Prime Minister try to hide behind his parliamentary privilege or will he testify?

[English]

Is he going to hide behind parliamentary privilege, or is he going to testify?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we read the investigator's report, there is absolutely no reason to suggest that I would do that.

Oral Questions

What I would say for the leader of the NDP, if anyone were to ask me about the inappropriate use of public funds, I would certainly suggest him as an expert witness.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was the RCMP that concluded, just this summer, that the \$90,000 paid to Mike Duffy in the Prime Minister's Office was "bribery of a judicial officer". It was a bribe, and at least 13 Conservative officers were involved.

The real question for the Prime Minister, who likes to give lessons on ethics and morals, is why did he not fire any of those other 13 Conservatives involved in the bribery of a judicial officer?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the lesson is if we live in a glass house, we should not throw stones.

The RCMP concluded no such thing, but as an increasing number of investigators will conclude, the leader of the NDP and many people of his party have themselves misused public funds. He will have to ask why he is not firing himself.

* * *

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Arthur Porter, Mike Duffy, Patrick Brazeau, why is it that so many of the Prime Minister's buddies wind up with handcuffs? I do not know.

[*Translation*]

It has been over a year since the Conservatives received a study showing that if they impose a toll on the new Champlain Bridge, there will be a dramatic increase in traffic on the other bridges in Montreal. According to the study, this will result in a lower quality of life for families, decreased productivity for businesses and more environmental pollution.

Why did the Conservatives hide the study on the Champlain Bridge and why are they refusing to follow the recommendations?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a contract process. I am encouraged to see that studies have been done in every area associated with this bridge.

I would like to once again congratulate the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs for the great work he has done on this new bridge, which is a wonderful asset for the greater Montreal area.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative EI plan has a fundamental flaw. Just when our economy needs jobs and growth, the Conservatives offer incentives to stay small and actually fire workers. Why not fix this and instead encourage companies to grow and actually hire more Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the leader of the Liberal Party tried to argue that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business supported this bizarre interpretation of the tax cuts recently announced by the Minister of Finance. The CFIB said that this was not the case.

However, that is not the only thing that the Liberal Party said yesterday. The Liberal Party's leader said that the Liberal Party would reverse income splitting. I would point out that income splitting has been of great benefit for the pensioners of our country. We strongly support it and we will fight anybody who wants to take that away.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, actually the CFIB said last week that no one was going to hire a new person for a few hundred dollars. Economic experts from the universities of Calgary, Laval and B.C. have all said that the Conservative EI plan is a disincentive to growth.

Why does the Prime Minister not instead offer an EI premium exemption for every new worker that Canadian businesses actually hire? That is how we create jobs and stimulate growth.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business actually said:

This announcement is fantastic news for Canada's entrepreneurs and their employees, and as such, can only be a positive for the Canadian economy.

Furthermore, the CFIB said this about the bizarre accusation made by the Liberal leader:

...a small business owner doesn't have time to research the eligibility requirements and then carefully manage their payroll to receive a few hundred dollars over two years.

The CFIB is strongly supportive of what we are doing and strongly opposed to the premium hikes proposed by the Liberal Party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental flaw in the Conservatives' employment insurance plan. They are offering companies \$2,000 to fire employees but only \$200 to hire them.

Instead, the government should be offering companies an exemption if they create jobs. That is how to stimulate economic growth and create jobs.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which said, "This announcement is fantastic news for Canada's entrepreneurs and their employees, and as such, can only be a positive for the Canadian economy."

This organization, which helps Canada's small and medium-sized businesses, welcomed this announcement and completely rejects the hikes to EI premiums proposed by the Liberal Party.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after years happily raiding the EI fund for more than \$57 billion, Conservatives and Liberals are now coming up with new ways to get workers to pay for their crackpot schemes. Just yesterday, we saw the Liberal leader make a bad idea even worse when he rolled out a plan that his so-called brain trust lowballed by almost \$1 billion. I want to call it a battle of wits, but when it comes to EI, both sides seem to be a bit unarmed. Is this the only real debate between the old two parties, how best to use the employment insurance program for anything other than employment or insurance?

• (1430)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer when I joined the fight against ALS by participating in the ice bucket challenge, I named the critic from the NDP: tick-tock, tick-tock.

As to his preposterous allegations, this job credit will advantage 90% of Canadian businesses. That is 780,000 companies, \$550 million to small businesses.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is good that he had to read that zinger into the record. It is important.

Here is a radical new idea for the Minister of Finance and the Conservative government. How about we offer tax breaks to businesses when they actually create new jobs, rather than this hope, wing and a prayer for long-term prosperity? Both Conservatives and Liberals will force workers to subsidize tax breaks for their own employers. How about laying off workers for once? How about helping those who go unemployed rather than funding bad schemes?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said this plan will increase jobs, 25,000 jobs. This has been praised by Dan Kelly, who is the president of the CFIB, because this will be good for small business. Small business is the generator of employment in this country and that is why this government has provided this benefit of \$550 million over the next two years so that small businesses will grow, prosper and generate employment.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, the employment insurance fund will have a \$3.5-billion surplus in 2015.

To create that surplus, the government cut benefits and limited access to the system, just as the Liberals did. The unemployed may never lay eyes on that \$3.5 billion.

The government cannot claim to be a good manager and dip blithely into the employment insurance fund.

Will the government support our bill and ensure that premiums are used the way they were meant to be used?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our small business hiring credit will lower employment insurance payroll taxes by 15% and allow small businesses to save more than \$550 million.

The CFIB stated that the credit will create 25,000 person-years of employment. The Liberals and the NDP support a 45-day work year that would increase premiums—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the past, 90% of workers were eligible for employment insurance benefits. Now, less than 40% of them are.

The Conservatives and the Liberals limited access to employment insurance. They cut benefits and diverted money in order to balance the budget at workers' expense.

It is a disgrace that governments in our country would do such a thing.

Will the government keep dipping into the employment insurance fund and showing disrespect? What did workers do to the Prime Minister to make him hate them so much that he is still making cuts at their expense?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this goes to show how out of touch the NDP is with small businesses.

We are lowering employment insurance payroll taxes by 15% to allow small businesses to save more than \$550 million. The CFIB has said that this is good news for people who are looking for work.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised to improve the temporary foreign worker program.

In June, this government promised, hand on heart, that employers who hired temporary foreign workers would not be allowed to lay off Canadian employees. Three months later, employers continue to lay off Canadians in order to use temporary foreign workers. Canadians deserve better than this government's empty promises.

Will the minister get the program back on the right track once and for all?

• (1435)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the hon. member has it all wrong. Obviously, the reforms we made to the temporary foreign worker program were fundamental.

Oral Questions

Since those changes, we have seen a 75% drop in employer requests for worker approvals. What the hon. member just described, employers laying off Canadians in favour of foreign workers, is completely illegal. It is not permitted, and serious penalties apply if employers do something like that.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from EI to the temporary foreign worker program it is always Canadians who pay the price for Conservative mismanagement. Three months after making changes to the temporary foreign worker program, employers are still laying off Canadians while hiring TFWs. Canadians are getting tired of this smoke and mirrors policy-making.

When is the minister finally going to fix this badly broken program and protect jobs for those living in Canada?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we announced a fundamental suite of reforms to the temporary foreign worker program earlier this year to ensure that it is used only as a last and limited resort, and that Canadians always come first in the workforce. Indeed, since those reforms were announced we have seen a 75% reduction in the number of applications for temporary foreign workers on the part of employers.

The reforms were so significant that even the NDP's finance critic was registering complaints that these reforms were too rigid and many other NDP MPs of course queued up to ask to overturn refusals on the part of our public servants.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister should tell the 58 electricians with Alliance Energy near Saskatoon who lost their jobs because of the program that the program is working so successfully now.

The rule of asking employers if they think a Canadian will lose his or her job “now or in the foreseeable future” gives huge wiggle room to employers. When will the government make real changes and have real penalties?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member is serious about this issue she should know how significant these reforms are. She should talk to businesses that understand that very well.

What she describes, employers laying off Canadians in order to replace them with temporary foreign workers, is simply and plainly illegal. If she has evidence of that I encourage her to bring it forward to Service Canada or to the Border Services Agency so that a formal inquiry can be launched.

The reality is this. The rules we have put in place will ensure that this program is used as a last and limited resort and that Canadians come first in our labour market, as they always should.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats believe that people who work 40 hours a week should not be living below the poverty line. When asked about raising living standards for employees in federally regulated workplaces, the Prime Minister simply shrugged his shoulders. Canadians deserve better.

In real terms the average minimum wage has increased by just 1¢ in over 40 years. Do the Conservatives really think that 1¢ every 40 years is an acceptable raise, or will they adopt our NDP motion for a \$15 federal minimum wage?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Is that not interesting, Mr. Speaker? The federal NDP makes up all kinds of nonsensical commitments that it knows it will never keep, but when people actually elect provincial NDP governments they never implement those policies. In fact, there have been two provincial NDP governments in office, one currently and one recently in Nova Scotia, neither of whom proposed provincial minimum wages anywhere close to what the federal NDP is proposing.

There is a de facto federal minimum wage. It is established by each province based on their local and regional labour market conditions. We trust provincial governments to do what is right for their people.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will introduce a federal minimum wage, because next year we will form the government.

[*Translation*]

The inequalities have not stopped growing since the Liberals and Conservatives misappropriated the employment insurance fund to balance their budgets on the backs of workers. What this means is that a growing number of people have to use food banks. The average yearly income has increased by just 1¢ since 1975, and because of their carelessness, 100,000 workers are currently living in poverty.

Why are the Conservatives so quick to give billions of dollars to corporations, yet are unable to get moving to increase the federal minimum wage?

• (1440)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were two provincial governments under New Democrat rule. Now there is only one. They never raised the minimum wage over \$10 an hour. We think that the current system, where the provinces determine the minimum wage, is working well. However, I know that this is not really a relevant issue for the member because he belongs to Québec solidaire, a separatist party.

* * *

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CBC has obtained a secret report prepared for Transport Canada on the impact of a toll on the Champlain Bridge. This damaging report predicts that there will be monstrous traffic jams on the other bridges because of the toll.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Will the Prime Minister finally agree to disclose everything about the Champlain Bridge so that Quebeckers finally have all the information?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, there is a contracting process for the construction of this new bridge. It will be an important asset for the greater Montreal area. I am very pleased to see that all aspects of this bridge are being studied.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the new EI credit has a design flaw. It gives firms up to \$191 to hire someone, but over \$2,200 to fire someone. Jack Mintz calls this “a disincentive to growth”.

The Liberal plan would cut EI premiums for all employers who hire new workers. It fixes the problem and it would come at the same cost as the Conservative scheme, but would create around 176,000 jobs. Will the minister recognize the flaw in his plan, and will he adopt a plan that works and gets more Canadians working?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would not normally use reference to the New Democrats on a mathematical question. It is not their strong suit, but they calculate that this Liberal plan would cost \$1.5 billion.

One thing we know is that it will not create the number of jobs that they pretend. Our plan will create over 25,000 jobs, according to the CFIB. It will generate employment because it will be giving \$550 million to small businesses, who are the generators of employment.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative Senator Mike Duffy's case is before the courts today.

The Prime Minister is a central figure in this whole affair, and Canadians are just not buying his story when he says it is difficult to imagine that he would have any useful information to add. In fact, the trial will provide the Prime Minister with an opportunity to testify under oath as to just exactly what he meant when he said to Nigel Wright that we are good to go.

When subpoenaed, will the Prime Minister testify?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has already answered that question, and the RCMP was quite clear in all of the documents that it provided.

At the same time, it does give me an opportunity, again, to mention the fact that it is the Liberal Party of Canada that wants to take away the pension splitting for seniors that has been so advantageous to our seniors. Of course, on this side of the House, we will continue to stand up for seniors and all taxpayers. That is why we put \$3,200 back in their pockets, and that is why the economy is growing.

We will continue to fight for all Canadians.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa is the worst in history, with over 5,000 cases being reported now. The rate of infection has overwhelmed the local health systems and risks destabilizing the entire region.

The United Nations has called for global support to fight the epidemic, and our allies are answering. President Obama announced \$750 million in an effort to respond to the outbreak, with 3,000 military personnel to help coordinate assistance.

Canada can and should do more. Will the government consider deploying Canada's disaster response team to help with this horrific epidemic?

● (1445)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is at the forefront of the Ebola response in West Africa. We are contributing funds to the WHO. We are contributing expertise to the WHO. Last night, we have offered several million dollars' worth of essential protective equipment to the WHO, such as masks, gloves and respirators. We also have a mobile lab on the ground with a team of medical experts helping to diagnose and test. We have offered up to 1,000 doses of an experimental vaccine that looks promising. It has been developed in Canada and given to the WHO to be used as a global resource.

Of course, we are in constant contact with international counter—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Ebola epidemic is spreading at an alarming rate in West Africa. According to the WHO, there are now 5,000 cases and more than 2,400 people have died. The virus keeps spreading faster and faster. The question is not whether Canada should intervene, but what it should do. The United States has an ambitious plan to deploy 3,000 military personnel to help coordinate efforts.

Will Canada answer the calls of the international community and do what is necessary to fight the Ebola outbreak?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been responding in a very substantive and progressive way in response directly to discussions with Margaret Chan, the head of the WHO.

Oral Questions

We are in constant contact with our international partners. Yesterday, I met with the U.S. ambassador to be briefed on what the U.S. is doing and to brief him on what Canada is doing. We will also be meeting with our global health security initiative partners in two weeks in Washington. Leading up to that, we continue to work in many different ways, whether it is a financial commitment, resource and equipment commitment, or having our mobile lab from Winnipeg on the ground and, of course, helping the WHO with expertise.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more soldiers have been lost to suicide since 2002 than died in combat in Afghanistan. According to National Defence statistics, 178 soldiers have committed suicide since 2002. That is right, 178. It is obvious that the Conservative government has abandoned our soldiers, our veterans and their caregivers.

How many more deaths will it take in order for the government to realize that it has a crisis on its hands?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that certainly is not the case.

I have to say that our thoughts and prayers are with the families who are dealing with the loss of their loved ones.

That being said, we have increased our investment in mental health services. There are now approximately 450 full-time mental health care workers. This gives us one of the highest ratios of mental health professionals to soldiers in NATO.

We will continue to get the job done for our men and women in uniform.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder the government kept this report under wraps. Sadly, its conclusions are a real shock.

The Conservative government knew that there was a total of 178 deaths by suicide since 2002 in the Canadian Forces, which is more than all our direct combat losses in Afghanistan combined. This problem has been swept under the rug by successive governments, and it is our men and women in uniform who are paying the price.

Will the minister now admit that there is a mental health crisis in the Canadian Forces and finally move to address it with the urgency that the soldiers deserve?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we started moving as soon we took office. One death is too many, but this has been a priority for this government. We have increased the military health budget by more than \$130 million, boosting the annual mental health budget by \$11 million for a total of \$50 million. This will continue to be a priority with this government.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, taxpayers in the riding of Ottawa—Orléans were shocked to learn that they were on the hook for a \$72,000 bill in expenses so that a

former general could move a few blocks down the road. What is even more shocking is that the individual who left taxpayers with this outrageous bill is none other than the Liberal leader's senior adviser Andrew Leslie.

What is the Minister of National Defence going to do to ensure that these types of outrageous expenses never occur again?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal Party, our government is committed to respecting taxpayer dollars. This benefit is meant to help forces members when they retire, but using this privilege to move down the street is not in the spirit of the program. It is unfortunate that a senior Liberal adviser blatantly abused taxpayer dollars. That is why we will restrict eligibility to those moving more than 40 kilometres. There will, of course, be exceptions for medical release and other circumstances.

Canadians elected us to put an end to the Liberal culture of entitlement, which is exactly what we have done.

* * *

● (1450)

[Translation]

THE SENATE

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an Ottawa communications firm just picked up a new contract to improve the Senate's image. That is a full-time job with the whole Brazeau and Duffy debacle alone. The Liberal and Conservative senators are sparing no expense. They have hired some crisis management pros. The senior strategist at Blueprint Public Relations, who was formerly with Gosselin Communications, had to appear before the Gomery commission to explain her role in the Liberal sponsorship scandal. She is well versed in crisis management.

Why not admit that the best public relations plan for the Senate would be to close up shop?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is the small item of the Constitution. Having said that, there really is only one party in this chamber that is under investigation. That is the NDP. It is on the hook for having abused taxpayer dollars to the tune of over \$1.5 million, paying for offices and partisan activities in provinces where it actually has no members of Parliament.

I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will do the right thing, that he himself will pay back and order the rest of his members to pay back to taxpayers the \$1.5 million that they owe them.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the unelected, unaccountable and under investigation Senate is spending \$150,000 of taxpayer money to give itself a makeover. It is kind of like putting house plants in a bordello. It has hired the perfect person for the job, the vice-president of Blueprint Public Relations, Wendy Cumming. Members will remember her. She was a veteran of the sponsorship scandal. Do members remember when she was speaking before Judge Gomery trying to explain charging taxpayers \$185 an hour to take corrupt politicians and public servants to hockey games?

The Prime Minister told us that getting rid of the Senate was better than the status quo. Does he still believe that?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are the New Democrats who hatched a plan to defraud Canadian taxpayers of over \$1.5 million for partisan political offices in areas of the country where they actually have no members of Parliament, who dispatched the people who work for them to participate in by-elections, who used resources of the taxpayers to try to win by-elections.

I think the Leader of the Opposition has to show some leadership and the rest of his colleagues have to do the right thing and repay taxpayers the over \$1.5 million that they owe them.

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HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said, “whenever there is a dangerous product identified, Health Canada inspectors act immediately”, but what she did not say is that we have to rely on the FDA to do Canada's work. The fact is that Health Canada has been keeping Canadians in the dark when it comes to drug safety. In fact, the minister admitted that Health Canada was unable to pull defective medication.

Could the minister tell Canadians specifically how many other unsafe drugs were left on the shelf because Health Canada cannot do its job?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, I do expect that Health Canada take all product safety issues seriously and address them immediately.

When it comes to our law, Vanessa's law, which is why our government has responded the way we have, when passed it will end these problems. It will ensure that clinical trial information will be disclosed on a public registry. It will ensure that positive and negative decisions on drug approvals are disclosed online. It will require tough new fines for companies that are putting Canadians at risk. Most importantly, it will give me the authority to recall unsafe drugs when I need to.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been in power for eight years, and we still have no law in place to protect Canadians from dangerous drugs. Where is the government's sense of urgency?

We proposed open, transparent measures, but the Conservatives refused these changes. In addition, the Conservatives have cut Health Canada's budget by \$20 million.

Why has the government done nothing for eight years to strengthen drug regulations and protect the safety of Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just completely false. First of all, we have passed what is a world-leading piece of legislation, Vanessa's law, to ensure that we are able to act quickly when these kinds of issues happen. We have also just recently created the openness and transparency framework, which will ensure—including on things like inspection of product facilities—that information will be posted online. We will now have one of the most open and transparent regulatory systems in the world when it comes to drug approvals.

As I have said repeatedly, I expect that Health Canada inspectors and product safety managers will deal with these issues as quickly as possible.

* * *

● (1455)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence should just stop pretending that his budget cuts are not contributing to the tragedy of suicides in the military. In fact, there have been at least 175 suicides among serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces during the 12 years of the Afghanistan mission; 158 soldiers were killed in combat during the same period. The death of a military member for any reason is a tragedy.

Can the minister confirm that more military personnel have died from suicide than from the combat mission in Afghanistan and commit to doing something to prevent these tragedies?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one is too many, and this has become a priority for this government since taking office, unlike under the previous administration of which she was a member.

I have indicated that we have increased our health care spending. We have increased the number of mental health care workers. I can tell the House that, unlike under the previous administration, this will be a priority for our government.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot claim any sort of leadership with the number of suicides among our Canadian Forces members. It is even worse for our veterans who are not receiving the support they need to deal with serious issues like PTSD because that is money the Conservative government would rather spend on self-promotion.

These men and women are neglected in the Canadian Forces and then completely abandoned as veterans. I ask the Minister of Veterans Affairs this. When will the government finally take the issue of suicides among our Canadian Forces and our veterans seriously?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of National Defence has already stated, and I concur, this is simply not a political issue.

Case managers and clinical care managers work with veterans day in and day out to assist them with their mental health needs. I encourage everyone—veterans, their family or friends—who think someone may be suffering from mental health conditions to seek the professional assistance they need right away and not in any way, shape or form give credibility to a political ploy, which this is not.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after seven years of the government's broken promises to introduce greenhouse gas rules for the oil and gas sector, Canadians are still waiting. Now we hear that Environment Canada has stopped talking to the industry and the Alberta government altogether. In fact, the government-led committee has not even met since March 2013. When will the government quit stalling, and when will we see the regulations?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priority is to protect the environment while keeping the economy strong. We are taking a sector-by-sector regulatory approach to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We have taken action on some of the largest sources of emissions in the country: the transportation and electricity generation sectors.

I am also looking forward to taking part in the UN Climate Summit in New York next week to speak to Canada's record on taking action on climate change.

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only is Environment Canada missing in action, but Public Works is as well. Emard Court is a 90-year-old World War II veteran. He has lived his entire life next to a lighthouse, but now the government wants to kick him off his land. Three mediation meetings were scheduled to sort out this mess, and all three have been missed by the government. Mr. Court served his country only to be evicted at the age of 90 by the government, a government that cannot even be bothered to show up. Is this how the government rewards its veterans?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously we do respect our veterans, but Public Works is acting as the disposal agent for DFO and we will continue to work with the Court family to reach a negotiated settlement to land title issues that are associated with this property.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to have lowered taxes, putting thousands of dollars directly back into the pockets of Canadian families. However, yesterday the leader of the Liberal Party criticized income splitting and said he would reverse it. I know that the seniors in my riding will be outraged when they find out that the Liberal leader would reverse our income splitting, forcing them to pay more.

Could the Minister of State for Seniors explain how reversing income splitting would affect seniors?

● (1500)

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader should explain why he has threatened to reverse income splitting and force seniors and families to pay more tax. This type of Liberal arrogance toward middle-class Canadian families and seniors is all too familiar. This is the same party that opposed the universal child care benefit because it thought parents would spend it on beer and popcorn. This is the same party that opposed every tax cut and measure our government has introduced for families and seniors, measures that are saving \$3,400 this year for average families and have taken nearly 400,000 seniors off the tax rolls completely.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, weeks ago I wrote the Minister of State for Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency requesting a plan of action for Borden-Carleton due to the impending McCain processing plant closure.

The closure means the loss of 121 jobs, impacts the community and spin-off industries, and places in jeopardy a market for potato producers.

Could the minister now detail for us a plan of action, including ACOA assistance, community industrial development, job retraining, and any measures to assist the P.E.I. potato industry competitiveness?

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this was a business decision by the management at McCain.

Our government is committed to supporting economic development in Prince Edward Island and throughout Atlantic Canada. In fact, as a result of the hard work of the member for Egmont, our Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, our government, through ACOA, has invested in over 601 projects throughout Prince Edward Island.

The Liberals, and that member in particular, have voted against each and every one of our economic development initiatives. When will the member get out of the way and allow economic development to continue?

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Jamila Bibi is facing charges of adultery in Pakistan. The penalty is death by stoning. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights has been looking into the case, but the Conservative government could not wait

Now she is sitting at Pearson Airport waiting to be put on a flight back to Pakistan and a potentially gruesome fate.

In the name of human rights, in the name of compassion, will the minister urgently act now, intervene and stop the deportation of Jamila Bibi?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a fair and generous asylum system where decisions are made by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board, not under political pressure but according to the facts.

Where claims fail, there is recourse to appeals. When those appeals are exhausted, we all expect failed claimants to leave our country.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the lead-up to Ukraine's parliamentary election in October, the Minister of Foreign Affairs today announced that Canada would be deploying up to 300 election observers.

Our government is proud of its long-standing support of the Ukrainian people's aspiration for freedom and democracy. We continue to stand with Ukraine during these troubling times.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please update the House on the ongoing situation in Ukraine?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for his leadership in this regard.

I can confirm that Canada is sending a large electoral observer mission to Ukraine to monitor the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Oral Questions

Furthermore, today we announced that Canada would impose additional sanctions on entities and individuals in Russia.

Canadians can count on our Prime Minister to stand up, to do the right thing. They can count on this government. The people in Ukraine can count on Canada to stand with them against this naked aggression.

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[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on August 26, 2014, the City of Longueuil and its mayor, Caroline St-Hilaire, passed a resolution calling for the continuation of home mail delivery.

Like us, municipal officials condemn Canada Post's decision, which will deprive Canadians of an essential service and create a real urban planning headache.

More than 5,000 households in Longueuil will be affected by 2015. Canada Post and the Conservatives are undermining the work that municipalities are doing to adapt their services to an aging population.

How can the government support the elimination of postal services, and how can it ignore our municipal officials?

● (1505)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2012, Canada Post actually delivered one billion fewer letters than it did in 2006.

The state of play today is that two-thirds of Canadians do not receive mail at their door.

In its five-point plan, Canada Post put forward changes that would ensure Canada Post would be able to service Canadians in the long-term future.

It is important to note as well that while some municipalities have made the choice that the hon. member has spoken to, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, at its annual conference in Niagara, defeated a resolution soundly on this same topic.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while work has begun to determine where the future oil port in Cacouna will be located, a public announcement on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada website—and not on Google, as the minister said yesterday—states that there is a considerable risk of harming the belugas.

What is more, the BAPE has not yet started an environmental review and the consequences are inadequately documented, yet the project has been accelerated. Everything seems to be happening too quickly and behind closed doors.

Business of Supply

Knowing that Quebeckers were seen as carriers of water in the past, will the government wait and act in accordance with the BAPE's studies and conclusions, or will it now simply see Quebeckers as carriers of bitumen?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, TransCanada has not yet submitted the construction of the marine terminal in Cacouna for review to the National Energy Board.

Our government has been clear that projects will only move forward if they are safe for Canadians and if they are safe for the environment. At this stage, the only work being conducted in this area is very exploratory in nature. It has been carefully reviewed by DFO experts and it has been authorized contingent on strict conditions.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this opposition motion. I want to thank the member for Brant for splitting his time with me. I wonder, when I read the motion, whether we would actually obtain the desired effects that the hon. member believes this motion would do.

First, as I am sure the hon. member well knows, the minimum wage in this motion as it is worded would apply only to those people who work in federally regulated industries, a small percentage of Canada's workforce. Of these workers, only a small fraction earn the minimum wage. According to a survey of federally regulated businesses that was conducted in 2008, only one-twentieth of a percentage point, or all of 416 employees, were actually earning the minimum wage. That works out to approximately 0.05%.

My second point is that if the Government of Canada were to unilaterally raise the minimum wage of workers that fall under its jurisdiction, it would create a two-standard system for workers. If the hon. member opposite were to read the Labour Code, he would find that the federal minimum wage is pegged to the minimum wage of the province or territory in which the work is carried out, as voted on by their respective legislatures. Provinces and territories are clearly best able to assess and respond to the requirements of their labour markets and establish appropriate minimum wage rates, unless of course the opposition parties are proposing to wholly repeal the section of the Labour Code that gives provinces this ability.

Which is it? Are the opposition members proposing to strip the provinces of their ability to respond to their local labour market? Or are they proposing to create a two-tier standard for workers?

We see no need to carry out wholesale changes to a system that is working perfectly well. For nearly 20 years, federal minimum wages have automatically been pegged to match the minimum wage of the

province or the territory in which the work is being done. My view is this has worked out pretty well.

Over the past several years, the provinces and territories have all increased their minimum wage, which is based on their local labour market conditions in each of those jurisdictions. In fact, several provinces have now indexed their minimum wage so that it automatically increases every year. Others have mechanisms in place to ensure that the minimum wage rate in their jurisdiction is reviewed on a regular basis.

It would seem a bit pretentious if we were to deny that the provinces and territories are fully aware of their labour market needs and should not be trusted in the analysis of the needs of their citizens and workers. Our government believes that these jurisdictions know how to assess and respond to their local labour market conditions. They are best positioned to establish appropriate minimum wage rates that reflect these realities.

However, the best way to support low-income Canadians is not by increasing the minimum wage or grandstanding the illusion of creating a minimum wage that in reality only applies to a very small fraction of the labour force, but by measures that support a strong economy and by creating well-paying jobs, which is our government's number one priority.

As members in the House know, there are skills shortages in certain regions and sectors of the economy. Our government has taken unprecedented action to train Canadians for new and better jobs in demand by the economy. To date, our actions have resulted in over six million young Canadians getting skills training and support for quality jobs.

● (1510)

I am sure that many of my colleagues, even those on the other side of the House who support this ambiguous motion, have heard from their constituents who own businesses that there is an abundance of people out there looking for work, but they just do not have the skills that are needed. When it comes to training Canadians for jobs that are actually in demand by the economy, the NDP has vehemently opposed virtually all of our measures.

Where was the opposition on the Canada job grant last year? We negotiated in good faith with all of the provinces and signed agreements with them. The NDP opposed this process, cheerleading the expiring of the labour market agreements instead.

When we cut the GST to the benefit of all Canadians, the NDP opposed it. The working income tax benefit? The NDP opposed it. Supporting older workers and their families through the targeted initiative for older workers and expanding it to include workers in small cities? The NDP opposed that too. Overhauling the temporary foreign worker program, during which the Minister of Employment and Social Development directly called upon employers to increase their wages and hire Canadians? The NDP just dismissed it as meaningless.

Business of Supply

We have heard about the lack of skilled labour in key sectors from people who are actually on the ground. Many sectors will urgently need new workers in the next decade. It is particularly true in construction and in the mining and petroleum industries. Skills Canada has told us that we will need one million skilled trade workers by 2020. As an example, five years after getting a journeyman's ticket, a plumber in Canada can earn about \$68,000 and an electrician about \$66,000. These are well-paying jobs that are very rewarding. If a minimum wage worker wishes to become an apprentice, the Government of Canada will support that worker in many ways in getting training for jobs that are in demand in the economy.

Let us be honest about what the NDP motion before us today actually is. It is nothing more than a symbolic stunt. Our government is focused on improving job prospects for Canadians and their families. In addition to the apprenticeship grants, economic action plan 2014 introduced the Canada apprentice loan. This loan provides apprentices with interest-free loans of up to \$4,000 to complete their training in a Red Seal trade.

The government is also taking other steps to support and protect Canadian families and to directly benefit people in the workforce. For example, the Minister of Finance recently provided small businesses with a tax break so they would pay less in EI premiums and create more jobs. What is more, the minister also confirmed that EI premiums for workers will go down in 2017. Payments will be reduced from the current \$1.88 per \$100 of earnings to \$1.47. How does this change help minimum wage earners across Canada, not just those hand-picked by the NDP in their symbolic motion? Lower premiums, of course, means more money in those workers' pockets.

For those workers who have lost their jobs due to their employers' bankruptcy or receivership, we have the wage earner protection program. It ensures that employees are paid wages, vacation pay, and severance or termination pay that is owed to them up to an amount equal to four weeks' maximum insurable earnings under the EI Act. Since WEPP's inception in July 2008, over 74,000 Canadians have received \$174.8 million in WEPP payments as of July 31, 2014.

In addition to that, our government's Helping Families in Need Act provides federally regulated employees with the right to take unpaid leave. For example, it provides up to 37 weeks of leave for employees who must care for a critically ill child, 104 weeks for children who are deceased due to a probable Criminal Code offence, and up to 52 weeks for missing children who are victims of probable criminal actions.

This government is doing a lot for workers and a lot to create new jobs. We are working on ensuring that things get done, that more Canadians are working, and that more families are being supported.

• (1515)

I will not support this motion. It is nothing more than a stunt. It does not help real workers in real communities like Mississauga—Streetsville. It is nothing more than a stunt effort by the NDP. I will not be supporting this motion.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member's deliberations about the relationship between the federal government and the provincial governments. I think back to the Conservatives' plan for a single

national securities commission, which would take it away from the provinces. For the benefit of corporations, the Conservatives are willing to take away certain powers from individual provinces.

When it comes to wages and workers, though, the Conservatives very much want to let the provinces decide. They will let the provinces spiral downward in terms of their support of workers.

The idea that the provinces are the best place to set minimum wages exhibits the same type of thinking from when provinces started to reduce the corporate income tax rate in order to attract businesses. The same thing applies to workers' wages.

If the federal government set an example of \$15 an hour for workers' wages within the next four years, we would be setting a post that the provinces could look at as the right amount, the amount that they should be aiming for. That is not happening today. The federal government is not interested in participating and protecting workers.

Why is it not willing to come to the table here with this very simple and straightforward opportunity to support the workers of this country?

• (1520)

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleague was not implying that provincial governments have been driving down their minimum wages. There is not a single province that has reduced its minimum wage. In fact, in the case of Ontario, the minimum wage is going up, and that is wholly within the jurisdiction of the Province of Ontario. The current Government of Ontario decided to do that.

I certainly have no objection, as a federal member of Parliament, to the province doing that. If the Northwest Territories wants to raise its minimum wage and the member can advocate to his local government and the area he represents that the minimum wage should be raised, let them go ahead. They can certainly do that.

This is a motion that would affect fewer than 10% of all the workers across Canada who are employed in federally regulated industries, among which a very small percentage are making less than \$15 an hour. It is a hoax.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Mississauga—Streetsville really talked about this measure as being symbolic. He talked about it as being perhaps a bit of a stunt that would impact very few workers.

Business of Supply

NDP provincial governments had the jurisdiction and the ability to make changes when they were in power. What did those governments actually do when they were in power and could have made those changes? As we know, the parties are very closely aligned provincially and federally. What was the reality for those provincial governments?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, obviously decisions on minimum wages vary across the provinces, mainly because more than 90% of all the workers in provinces are covered by provincial labour laws, with the Employment Standards Act in my home province of Ontario as an example.

To answer the parliamentary secretary's question, over the past 20 years many governments of all three political stripes in Ontario have made decisions to freeze the minimum wage and not increase it. Again, though, those decisions were made by those duly elected governments. If people want to change that, then I guess they have to change the government.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Davenport.

I am proud to say that as many Canadians know, Newfoundland and Labrador is a have province. This is not a news flash. In 2008, for the first time since Confederation in 1949, almost 60 years ago, we hit a milestone in that we stopped receiving equalization.

For years we were seen as a drain, a poor cousin of Canada, although that is most definitely debatable, and I would say it was never the case. Today we officially contribute more to the Confederation than we get back.

Our confidence, our self-esteem in our identity as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians has improved. We are not cocky, though. We are not uppity. We look down on no one. The memory of hard times is not that far off and it never seems to be that far away. There are still far too many people who are not benefiting from the have status. It feels good to be a have province.

We were always known across Canada as hard workers who were proud of where we come from, but now we are just a little bit prouder. But, and here is the but, in the wise words of one of my constituents, there are still too many have-not people. There are too many have-not families in a have province.

Former Premier Brian Peckford once famously said that “one day the sun will shine and have-not will be no more.” The economic sun is finally shining in Newfoundland and Labrador, but there will always be have-nots. That is why I stand today in support of the motion by the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should reinstate the federal minimum wage and increase it incrementally to \$15 per hour over five years.

At \$10 an hour, the minimum wage in Newfoundland and Labrador is tied for lowest in the country, and we still have the highest unemployment rate of all provinces. There has not been an increase in the minimum wage in Newfoundland and Labrador since 2010. That will change next month when the minimum wage in my province will increase by 25¢ an hour. For a full-time minimum wage worker, that 25¢ extra an hour will work out over the course of a week to \$10, which will roughly buy four litres of milk and a

couple of loaves of bread. It is not a lot. An increase of 25¢ an hour will not make much of a difference in the lives our have-nots.

The New Democratic Party of Newfoundland and Labrador is calling for a greater increase in the minimum wage. In August 2012, a report commissioned by the Progressive Conservative government recommended increasing the minimum wage and tying it to inflation and the consumer price index. The Progressive Conservative government of Newfoundland and Labrador ignored that report.

So much for the Prime Minister's comment in question period today about how he would leave it to the provinces to set their own minimum wage. Provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador set a minimum wage and then ignore it.

Newfoundland and Labrador New Democrats held a minimum wage town hall in St. John's earlier this month, coincidentally. It was an event that drew too many stories of poverty.

Let me quote Russell Cochrane. He is a St. John's resident in his twenties who has worked several minimum wage jobs. He said:

It's degrading when you work a full-time job, you come out of it with only enough money to pay your rent and then have one week of groceries, wondering where you're going to eat for the second. That hunger sticks, and it's a hunger that doesn't only degrade your body—it wears at your soul, it wears at your sense of self-worth.

The motion before the House today is a starting point to address that degradation, to address that hunger, to address income inequality. By boosting standards for workers under federal jurisdiction, such as those who work in banks and financial services, telecommunications, and broadcasting, the federal government can show leadership, set an example for provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador, and improve wages across the country.

● (1525)

Speaking of my home province, it has one of the highest percentages of minimum wage earners in Canada. In 2011, 9.7% of workers, or 19,700 workers, earned minimum wage. In Canada, as a whole, only 6.8% earned minimum wage. New Democrats believe that Canadians who work hard and play by the rules should be able to make a decent living. Is that asking for too much? It is not. Is that asking for too much here in Canada, one of the richest countries in the world?

We are not reinventing the wheel. There was a national federal minimum wage until 1996. What happened then? The Liberals eliminated it. Instead of doing the right thing and raising the federal minimum wage that had stagnated for a decade, the Liberals washed their hands of the problems and killed the national minimum wage altogether.

In real terms, between 1975 and 2013, the average minimum wage increased by just one penny. That means that workers earning the average minimum wage have only received a 1¢ raise over the past 40 years, even though the Canadian economy has grown by leaps and bounds.

Business of Supply

The motion to reinstate the federal minimum wage and increase it incrementally to \$15 an hour over five years will have little impact on federal finances as most federal employees already earn above the minimum wage. Most private sector workers under federal jurisdiction also make above the \$15-an-hour mark, but the reinstatement of a federal minimum wage will show—and here is that word again—leadership. It will show leadership and send a message to all provinces to follow suit. Income inequality in our country is spiralling out of control. The incomes of the top 1% are surging while the typical Canadian family has seen its income fall over the last 35 years of mostly federal Liberal governments.

Let me summarize. No full-time worker in Canada should live in poverty. I repeat, no full-time worker in Canada should live in poverty. I challenge every member across the floor of the commons to stand and disagree with that point. In the words of Linda McQuaig, an author and journalist and recent New Democrat candidate, a \$15-an-hour federal minimum wage would be a bold step toward establishing the principle that no full-time worker should live in poverty.

Minimum wage jobs are not just for teenagers, a way to occupy them after school and put spending money in their pockets. Minimum wage jobs are real jobs. They are real incomes that too many families depend on. Women, for example, are disproportionately minimum wage earners. In Newfoundland and Labrador, women make up 60.4% of minimum wage earners. Other minimum wage earners include immigrants, recent graduates, and too many others who can only find part-time work and need to hold down two or three jobs to survive.

Let me bring this speech home with another quote from the minimum wage town hall in St. John's earlier this month. Let me quote Ellen. She is a Memorial University engineering student. She stated, "We need to stop being cheerleaders for the most wealthy interests in our society and stick up for someone who needs it".

More and more people in this country need sticking up for. More and more, the gap between the rich and the poor in this country is widening. From the world's perspective, Canada is a have country. Few countries have what we have, but it is the have-nots that we have to look out for. If the measure of a great country is how well it looks after its most vulnerable, then we have fallen short under successive Conservative and Liberal administrations before it.

● (1530)

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments. However, as I listened to him, I understood his impassioned presentation but I think he has the argument backwards. He talked about leadership, but leadership is demonstrating change that will ensure change happens through tax cuts, tax credits, leadership and job creation in the economy, and economic growth.

I would like to ask the hon. member, as he considers the data and his argument, to source where he found these numbers for people, which he has been discussing. We see minimal numbers that would be impacted by this particular motion, and that is supported by the third party, I might add.

I think that the opposition members are either working from flawed data or no data. I would ask the member to confirm what the

motion would do in numbers, where the NDP members got these numbers, and more importantly, what are we going to do for youth with the motion, because I do not see it.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister of Canada was asked a question in today's question period, and this will respond to the hon. member's question about leadership.

The Prime Minister was asked a question today about a national minimum wage and whether or not he would agree to it. Would he agree to the New Democratic proposal that we have a national minimum wage of \$15 an hour to be set over the next five years? Basically, the Prime Minister said, which again comes back to leadership, that he would leave it to the provinces.

The example I gave in my speech, again coming back to leadership, is how the province of Newfoundland and Labrador set up an inquiry in 2012 to have a look into the provincial minimum wage, and it recommended increasing the minimum wage. What did the Progressive Conservative government of Newfoundland and Labrador do with that recommendation? It ignored it.

The Prime Minister and the Conservatives have an opportunity to show leadership across this country, but what do they fail to do yet again? Show leadership.

● (1535)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks today and the motion that he has put forward.

I think all of us in the House will agree that no family or individual should ever live in poverty in this country. We are a country of tremendous wealth and opportunity. However, we know that those cases do exist, and I think that, wherever possible, government has to show leadership to industry, business and society in general that doing the right thing always pays off.

I would ask my colleague today how many people employed within the federal service work for less than \$15 an hour. How would this increase impact these individuals if it is to be rolled out only over a period of five years? Will the inflation rate at that time have contributed to the necessity of a higher increase in wage?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, as I outlined in my speech, the number of federal government employees, or the number of private sector employees across Canada who are federally regulated who make under \$15 an hour are few and far between. This is a symbolic move. Again, to refer to my last answer, this is an opportunity for the Conservatives and the Prime Minister of Canada to show leadership across this country, to show leadership to the provinces, and to set the bar in terms of minimum wage.

Business of Supply

Again, the Conservative government is failing to set the bar.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in this place representing the good people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto on an issue that is incredibly important to many workers in the city of Toronto, in fact to many workers across the country.

I have been listening with quite a lot of interest to the debate today and the nitpicking from the government side about the need for a federal minimum wage. I find it particularly interesting that I have not heard a single member of Parliament from the Conservative Toronto caucus talk about the fact that Toronto has a youth jobs crisis.

Young people are working in federally regulated industries such as the telecommunications industry and broadcasting, and many of them are making far below the proposed federal minimum wage. Many of them are working for free as unpaid interns with no protection under Canada's Labour Code against sexual harassment in the workplace, no protection around the right to refuse unsafe work, no protection in terms of the ability to cap the number of hours that an unpaid intern in a federally regulated industry can work.

Now the government is arguing that we do not need a federal minimum wage.

I am sure the hon. member across the way remembers the time when young people could graduate from high school and get a job in this country, a job that was good enough to raise a family, a job that came with a pension at the end of it, a job that they could keep for the rest of their lives. They would graduate from high school or university and get a job and keep that job.

Sometimes the government seems to think we are still in that era, those happy days. Those happy days came and they went. Today people are working from contract to contract. They are working multiple part-time jobs. Some are freelance and as it becomes more and more difficult to land a full-time job, more and more are looking to do various jobs as self-employed people to fill the gap.

To round all of this out, as I have mentioned, we have unpaid interns and we have young people graduating with record student debt as Ontario students face the highest tuition fees. Then these young people are landing in a labour market where youth unemployment is twice the national average, where they are unable to find jobs in their fields of study, and where all too often the perceived solution is to work for free.

It is worth noting in this place that there are estimates pegging the number of people working as unpaid interns. There are many good unpaid internship programs out there. However, especially in federally regulated industries, highly profitable and quite powerful Canadian companies are availing themselves of free labour from young people who are just desperate to get a toehold in the labour market.

Young workers across the country face dauntingly precarious work realities. Housing is too expensive. Post-secondary education is too expensive. Public transit is inaccessible or inadequate, and oftentimes too expensive as well. Training programs are often tied to employment insurance, but when a person is working multiple part-

time jobs or on a short-term contract, he or she cannot access that training.

I have not heard a lot of talk today from members on the other side about barriers for newcomers, which are even higher. Newcomers are desperate for Canadian work experience. This is the work experience they need so that they can get the job that Canada essentially said would be available to them when we invited them to Canada. They are desperate to get that job. They will work for free as unpaid interns. They will work at a temporary placement agency where the take-home pay is oftentimes lower than the provincial minimum wage.

• (1540)

Workplaces are becoming fundamentally unequal. New workers, young workers, racialized immigrants, and aboriginal workers can expect much less than older workers at the same workplace. In the very same workplace, some workers have defined benefits pensions, others not. Some have extended health benefits, others not. Some have job security and others not.

When asked by *The Toronto Star* what the greatest issue facing Canadian workers is, Maureen O'Reilly, president of the union local representing Toronto's library workers—she is the union boss for librarians, just so they do not get too afraid over there on that side of the House—said:

Precarious work is one of the greatest challenges facing workers in [Toronto], particularly in the [library system]. Library workers are...predominantly female...with about half of them part-time. We know precarious workers make less and have limited or no benefits or pensions. We need good jobs in our community especially for our youth so that all Torontonians [and I would extend to all Canadians] can share in a bright future and contribute to our local economy as both neighbours and taxpayers.

In all the chest-thumping we hear so often from the government side of this House, the Conservatives never describe the jobs they are purportedly creating. They never talk about whether these jobs are good jobs. They never talk about whether these jobs are jobs that come with a living wage, benefits, or a pension. They never talk about whether these are jobs that a young person can imagine for starting a life, starting a career, and starting a family and becoming the kind of active, engaged citizen that only a generation ago was just the obvious thing we would become. That is not happening anymore.

SEIU's Sharleen Stewart represents hospital, long-term care, and home care workers in Canada. What she said is a very important point when we discuss what this actually means for Canadian workers. She said, "some of the people doing the most meaningful work [in Canada] are the lowest paid. And the workers are predominantly women", especially in her sector among the workers she represents.

Business of Supply

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Increasing the minimum wage is an important step towards closing the income gap and creating a fairer economy. The federal government could take a leadership role and encourage the provinces to increase their standards, thus improving wages across Canada.

Indeed, in 2006, the Federal Labour Standards Review Commission recommended that the government reinstate the federal minimum wage and that it be benchmarked to the low-income cut-off established by Statistics Canada. The commission suggested that the minimum wage be high enough that someone working full time would not live below the poverty line.

[*English*]

What should fully engage this place is creating an economy where workers can make a living wage. That is the crux and the foundation of the debate we are having today. It is the question the government members must answer. Do they believe that in this economy, Canadian workers deserve a living wage? If they say yes, that Canadian workers deserve a minimum wage, a working wage, a living wage, they will support this motion.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Davenport spent a great deal of time talking about youth, youth unemployment, and unpaid internships. That is a very important area for us to discuss.

As we all know, the percentage of unemployed youth is much too high. It is important to note that our government recently committed \$40 million for paid internship programs. We have done a number of different measures to actually try to support youth employment.

What I would like to focus on is that we know that there are going to be pluses and minuses in any minimum wage increase in any particular province. Have the NDP members looked at the impact in terms of youth unemployment? Have they done their homework to actually bring this message to the table?

Youth are incredibly important. The unemployment rate is a concern to all of us.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say first is that given the importance of youth unemployment, the real question is why the government has not done its homework.

I would also like to note that it is true that the government did put some money into internships. That is important. I am glad to see that once in a while the government listens to the New Democratic Party of Canada, the official opposition. I thank the government for that.

On the subject of the minimum wage, of course we have done our homework, of course we have seen the data, and of course, the commission in 2006 recommended that the government establish a minimum wage. The body of research out there that shows that this works, that this is good, that this is important, and that this should be done is resounding.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, much has been said across the way about how we should be leaving this issue to the provinces.

When the Conservatives were running the province in Ontario, they froze the minimum wage for 12 long years. As a result, in my riding of York South—Weston, a by-election was fought in 2007 on the minimum wage. The NDP was successful in winning that seat in that by-election as a result of advocating for a \$10 minimum wage.

Within a couple of weeks of that decision, the provincial government was forced to raise the minimum wage. Guess what. It was not a calamity. The sky did not fall in. Industry did not fall apart. The world as we knew it did not end. It went up.

It has not gone up far enough. I think that is part of what we are talking about.

There is a principle at stake here. I know it is difficult for the members opposite to understand what a principle is, but the principle is that the free market is not doing the job. The government pretends to be in favour of the free market, and then it introduces temporary foreign workers, it introduces EI rules that mean that people have to take lower wages, and it makes organizing harder.

The principle is that people should be able to earn a living wage. That is the principle we are standing for. Do you agree?

• (1550)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is not whether I agree but rather whether the member for Davenport agrees.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for York South—Weston will likely not be surprised when he hears that I do agree.

Let us go back to youth unemployment for a second. If young people are watching this debate today, they are going to be hard-pressed to find anyone on the government side who really understands what they are going through.

If people are working in the telecom sector, if they are working for some of our Canadian companies, the Rogers and the Bells out there, they are going to be looking at this debate and saying “Yes, finally, someone is fighting for us in the House of Commons.”

That someone is the official opposition.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

We just heard talk of supporting the principles behind this member's motion. It is obvious to us in the Liberal Party that we should stand in support of those principles. We all understand that income inequality is one of the most challenging and volatile economic conditions we face in society today. I represent a riding very close to Davenport, and many of the issues that have been raised are poignant and personal to the residents and folks I represent.

We cannot create a strong middle class by continually cutting taxes for people of affluence and strong means to earn. The middle class is created with income support and with speaking to income equality. That is an important issue that the House should be seized with.

Business of Supply

The problem we have in Trinity—Spadina is that it is not simply a matter of an hourly wage. We have a lot of people who work in the health care sector, and other federally regulated sectors as well, who require three jobs to earn a single salary. We can boost all the wages we want, but when employers are not providing the hours, the take-home pay at the end of the day does not change. That is an issue we struggle with as we try to figure out a way to create a more just society.

We also know that those same employers will pay what we want them to per hour but will cut employees' hours so that they can avoid paying them benefits. Simply talking about wage increases and the absence of a comprehensive strategy for income support and the eradication of poverty is a strong gesture, but in the end, it is only a symbolic gesture.

We will support this, but we think there needs to be much more work done on it.

In the past, when previous governments moved to tackle this issue, one of the things the opposition party used to remind others in Parliament was the fact that we needed to do this in concert with partners. Employers, labour unions, and the government need to work together on this. One of the challenges in the way this bill is being presented to us is that it is not a tripartite agreement. It does not consolidate the conversation and bring it forward as a consensus, and it does not bring it forward with reforms to other parts of the Canada Labour Code that the federal government and we in Parliament have carriage of.

I know that the member for Davenport has spoken with great eloquence about the need to deal with contract workers in the telecommunications and broadcast industries. In the riding I represent, where many of these businesses are centred, we know that contract work escapes the hourly wage. We are contracting out work that used to be done by people who were paid by the hour, such as editors and other technicians. Their contracted-out work rarely captures an hourly rate and is almost always bid on by the job.

Simply talking about minimum wage is not going to capture the industry as it is currently configured, nor is it going to solve the problem of income inequality, let alone the precarious nature of much of this work. Therefore, work needs to be done on this file, and it needs to be done comprehensively.

While we support this bill in principle, we are astonished at the lack of a comprehensive approach by the party that has presented it.

We also know that there is a trend emerging here, where symbolic gestures from one side of the House are met with empty gestures on the other side of the House. The EI premiums are a perfect example of this. We see strong statements being made, but when we get down to the details, it is simply an empty gesture or a symbolic gesture.

What we need is a comprehensive approach to income inequality, one that knits the various challenges into a comprehensive approach in partnership with everyone involved in this very challenging issue.

We also know that when we talk about \$15 an hour, what we are not really capturing is the annual salary. The annual salary works out to about \$31,000 a year. That is the problem. To many of us, \$15 an hour sounds like five times what we used to earn when we were on

minimum wage, but to try to support a family of four on \$31,000, with or without income splitting, is impossible in places like Toronto. If we do not also have a housing policy, a national day care program, and all of these issues that are comprehensive and part of a knit-together approach to dealing with income inequality and poverty, what we are making are gestures and nothing but gestures.

This party will support this bill in principle, but we look forward to returning to a time when the tripartite agreement the opposition party spoke to in principle while it was the third party is also part of this comprehensive movement going forward.

● (1555)

What businesses were consulted? What sectors were consulted? We can rely on reports that are 10 years old all we want, but a new era requires new thinking and requires a new collaborative approach. That is the approach that the party I represent will be standing for and speaking toward. That is why I have spoken here today.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge and congratulate my colleague from Trinity—Spadina for what I believe is his first occasion to speak in the House, apart from question period. It is hard to disagree with the general thrust of his speech, other than to say that I think he may be missing the point when he says this is not a comprehensive approach. Individual pieces, when looked at with other individual pieces that are not up for debate in the same motion, can all add up to something very important.

Increasing minimum wage and having a universal child care program are two of the most significant measures, among many others that will be needed, to combat poverty and to combat the serious income equality that we all know is undermining our society. We have announced very clearly that everybody should be expecting a universal child care policy from us. We have heard about the federal minimum wage. I want to ask whether my hon. colleague from Trinity—Spadina will be demanding a universal child care policy too, going forward.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, that is without a doubt. Universal child care and making sure that child care is part of an employment strategy—but also a fundamental human right, I believe—is something that the party I belong to has believed in for a long time and is prepared to work on. Again, the issue may come down to who we consult with, how we deliver it and what provincial agreements are required to deliver that program. On that, hard work lies in front of us. If only we had accepted it the last time this Parliament dealt with a national child care program; if only we had supported that, imagine where our children would be today.

However, the issue I speak to and the issue my comments were directed at was that we need to knit this together. The example I highlighted was one from the telecommunications and broadcasting industry, a federally regulated program, where quite clearly the hourly rate has gone out the window and what we now have are individuals bidding on work and bidding on that work in a way that defies the hourly calculation. Therefore, this proposal, while in principle it deals with income inequality, does not deal with the actual working conditions people are dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

Business of Supply

•(1600)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to welcome the member for Trinity—Spadina to the House. I am sure we will have a good year of debate forthcoming over a number of different issues.

What I would like to note of particular interest is that the Liberal government had many years, but the results for low income people are really coming in under our government. We have the lowest number. The low income cut-off level is down to 8.8%, the lowest in Canadian history. We have the working income tax benefit. We have measure after measure that have made a real difference in people's lives, such as lowering the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

However, I do want to note that it was the Liberals and the NDP who both supported the transition to going with the provincial rates. I have always believed that, for items like this, sometimes communities and even micro-communities are in the best position to make decisions about wages. Again I note the opposition flip-flop, but is the member really saying that he does not trust the provinces to be able to deal with this issue in a comprehensive and appropriate way?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I trust the provinces to respond in their jurisdictions as they see fit. What I do not trust is the current government's record on poverty.

The riding I represent has, within an hour's drive, more poor children living in it now than any other time in its history. There are more poor children living within an hour of City Hall in downtown Toronto than there are in the entire Maritimes combined. That is the record of the member's government. That is the record of a government that has walked away from this conversation and walked away from its responsibilities on housing, on child care, on income support.

The member's government, the government opposite, has had a deplorable record on dealing with poverty. Perhaps it is precisely because of the government's response to poverty that we have to step up and provide some leadership. That is why we will be supporting this bill, because this bill starts to speak to one of the pressing issues of our day, which is income inequality, and it has become decidedly worse, cruelly worse and unfairly worse under the leadership of the party across the aisle. The reason we have to provide this leadership is that, quite clearly, industries under federal regulation have changed and it is time for a new approach. We cannot be stuck in the past if we are trying to deal with the future.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleagues on this side of the House from the New Democratic Party bringing this forward for debate, because so far I am finding some very good themes put forward. I am certainly finding some good ways of addressing poverty. This is one of the elements that does that.

When we consider that minimum wage is an issue, primarily of provincial jurisdictions, there are two things that play here. I just want to talk about some of the elements of poverty reduction, income inequalities and what we can do to reduce that income inequality gap.

Some of the illustrations that have been put forward today talk about a wage that helps grow the middle class in such a way that it is good for the economy, social services and communities. It provides for local infrastructure, not just roads and bridges but recreation infrastructure as well, which is essential for any community, small or large. As my hon. colleague from Trinity—Spadina pointed out, there is a staggering number of poor children in his riding.

When we address federal minimum wage, we look at a small part of the population, but the narrative is one that is sound, which is to provide people who do good work in our country a livable wage, so they can provide for their families. Let us also tie in other elements to this. Let us look at better benefits. Let us look at social programs, such as child care. Let us look at other programs that we debate about and work toward in this place.

I will not zero in on the fact that there is a minuscule number of people affected here. For these people, it means the world. Let us expand this further as a step toward a better social progressive policy from which the country could benefit. We go back to the 60s and talk about the formation of the Canada pension plan and old age security. All these debates took place as a small step toward what we have right now. This is how we do it. We look at how we can illustrate the people affected by a minimum wage. We have people who require a minimum wage to live.

Nowadays prices are astronomical in many sectors of our economy. Let me just take one of those. That is energy. Right now in my riding, the average age is above 50. A lot of the families are above 50 or 60, and in some case above 70s. They own their own two-storey homes. For one couple, both 70 years old, it costs \$1,400 per month to heat their home. That is an absolutely staggering figure. The fact that they have already paid the mortgage on that home allows them live in that house. Otherwise, it would not be affordable at all. Once food prices go up, then there will be real trouble.

Let us go from what they are going through to a younger couple in the same situation, with higher heat costs and higher prices for food. They need that base degree of social sincerity that we can only create here in policy that would allow them to make a good living. What we have is a situation where a minimum wage is one of those policies, in addition to other social measures like medicare and child care.

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However, let us be careful, because one of the things we have been saying here is that we would love to have the minimum wage doubled in certain cases. In Newfoundland and Labrador it is \$10 per hour. Twenty dollars an hour would be great, but here is the problem with that. I know people who run small businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador. I met a man just a while ago. I went to his convenience store and I asked him how he felt about the new minimum wage rules. He said that if the minimum wage were to go up any more he would not be able to hire a second person. He would pretty much have to work 16 hours a day. Therefore, let us look at both sides of this situation very closely and be very careful, because a small business person who pays that wage also has to make a living to contribute to that community.

Let us look at this particular policy and how we can grow the middle class and allow all of society to benefit from this. Many years ago we transferred this to the provinces. I understand what the other side is saying. Even though they are opposing this measure, they are only talking about provincial jurisdiction.

• (1605)

If we look at this particular wage, a study states that only 416 people earn the minimum wage of the province in which they work, so that is who would be affected by this. As I said earlier, that is a minuscule number of people, but the measure is one step toward what we feel is a greater society. We can improve our services and then we can get to other things such as child care, which I mentioned earlier.

The minimum wage rates across the provinces range, but the range is not really that great. It goes from \$10 an hour in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador and Northwest Territories to a high of \$11 per hour in Nunavut and Ontario, \$10.72 in the Yukon and \$10.70 in Manitoba. So that gives us the idea. We have a \$1 variance, so across the country our provincial minimum wage structure is pretty much even across the board.

We have to strike the balance between what is acceptable to small business and what is an affordable wage. If I would come down on one side or the other, yes, I want an affordable wage. That was why the fight back in Newfoundland and Labrador, on the provincial side, was a long fight, but we went from just over \$8 per hour up to about \$10, which really people thought was a huge, significant increase at the time, but it really was not because there are a couple of things at play.

Let us factor in the costs of medicines. Let us factor in the costs of medical care that has to be paid for. If one person in a couple becomes sick with cancer, that person has to travel—at least where I come from, in a rural area—long distances to receive the treatment they need. That costs money. A lot of that is not covered under our current medicare regime. Therefore, the cost of living goes up that much. The \$10 per hour that people were pleased to receive when it happened now becomes less significant. The vast majority of people receiving that minimum wage do not receive the right amount of benefits to subsidize the medical care that they so need. That is the other aspect of this.

I hope we will support this today as a step toward developing better progressive policies that we can present to the people. I am not using this as some 2015 election ploy. I am talking about the fact that

we can come up with private members' bills, motions in the House and opposition day motions like we have today, and we can use this to present to the people and say as a Parliament of all parties that we have so much further to go when it comes to progressive policies. We can talk about the past all we want, but that is not really the right bridge to build upon in order to get better wages, in order to get better benefits for the most vulnerable in our society.

I appreciate the fact that some people oppose this and some people support it, but let us come up with decent arguments as to why or why not. When we look at some of the studies that have been done, we see that some of the prices out there now for some of the basic goods of individuals are really something. If we look at the size of a family in rural areas, we see that on this chart the before-tax 2011 level of a one-person family is \$16,038 per year. As my hon. colleague from Trinity—Spadina pointed out, this minimum wage gives around \$30,000 a year. Let us assume for a moment that they do not get the benefits of someone who is making twice that. Let us talk about a decent package of benefits for not just an individual but also a spouse or partner and children.

This is essentially the topic that is not addressed here, but it is something that we have to keep in play when it comes to this and when it comes to pensions, because I believe a higher wage is the first step toward a progressive policy for the impoverished. It is something that is woven within the fabric of everything we talk about that is to enable people. To me this is not an economic issue; it is an issue of basic living in this country for those who are most vulnerable, especially the people my colleague from Trinity—Spadina spoke about and those in my rural riding as well. I thank him for that.

• (1610)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing lots of numbers being thrown around today, and I am hearing this is not enough and this is not a comprehensive plan. However, let us take a look at it. What we are debating here is to raise the minimum wage to \$15 for those that are regulated as well as employed in the federal sector.

My question for my Liberal colleagues and my colleague who just spoke very simply is this. Are they actually going to support this motion that is here before them?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, yes.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue and for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to most of my hon. colleague's speech, but I missed the first part of it. I appreciate the candour that he brings to the House and the importance of this subject. We both come from similar areas where there are a lot of low-wage jobs. However, if we are to have this discussion, let us have an honest discussion about what minimum wage does.

There would be a handful of jobs affected if this federal minimum wage was put in place, so let us have a discussion about getting youth employed in our country, and it is not through the minimum wage. The minimum wage can be a disincentive for employers to hire youth.

Let us have an honest discussion of how we get youth employed and how we do something about internships, unpaid internships in particular. Let us not look at window dressing and in all honesty, the motion is window dressing.

Let us have this discussion. I would be happy to have it.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, window dressing or not, the windows still have to be dressed at the end of the day, and that is why I am supporting this. We all should support the motion.

Our leader has a policy for EI that would certainly bring youth into the system. I hope the member has had a chance to look that over and give it careful consideration. We are putting it out there for the Conservatives to enact, and by all means, we would applaud them for doing it.

The other thing the member mentioned, as I mentioned before, the motion represents a small number of people getting to that \$15-an-hour mark, which I think is a great thing to do, phased in the way the NDP wants to do it. According to a study that was done, it would affect only 416 jobs. This maybe is window dressing, but it is certainly a gesture that is worth accepting.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up on my colleague's last point.

During the debate, it is important to recognize that we are talking about a federal minimum wage. However, for the vast majority of individuals who are at a marginal wage rate, no matter where they live in Canada, it is primarily set by provincial governments.

People who might be watching should be thinking that if the motion were to pass, it would not change directly the wage of the person who is flipping hamburgers or providing a particular service at a minimum provincial rate. Depending on which province one is in, the minimum wage fluctuates for the vast majority. I would estimate 85% plus of the working population would be affected by the minimum wage set by provinces.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, as was mentioned earlier, the minimum wage rates range from \$10 to \$11 per hour, with \$10 being the minimum wage for New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories, and \$11 an hour in both Nunavut and Ontario. This is the provincial jurisdiction.

One of the benefits of saying yes to the motion would be that we could illustrate that a \$15 per hour minimum wage would be a noble thing to get to. However, let us also keep in mind that when it comes to small businesses, they have to be consulted. This is why the tripartite model in this situation would be a worthy exercise.

I do not know if that was addressed by the members in the party moving the motion. I hope they would agree with this tripartite way of dealing with something like this, including small business owners. It would be a responsible thing for them to do rather than just saying

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that we need to up the wage and whatever the business owners feel about, that is just too bad, it has to be paid.

I would hope this proposal would come with a great deal of respect. I may be blindly optimistic, but I like to think that I support the motion for all the right reasons.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past 35 years, 94% of the increase in income inequality happened under Liberal governments.

While that number is shocking, it is not surprising, considering that it was the Liberals who decided to get rid of the federal minimum wage.

[English]

Our southern neighbours have already set the path with the fight for the \$15 movement that started back in 2012. Last summer, thousands of workers took to the streets to demand a decent salary. What came to light with these protests was that the people who earned minimum wage were not solely students who wanted extra money.

Jerry Dias, the president of Unifor, stipulates that these jobs are also a step into the workforce for immigrants, recent graduates, and many other people who can only find employment in these types of jobs. That situation was acknowledged by religious leaders, politicians, and community leaders. So far, the movement led a few cities, such as Seattle, to accept the race.

[Translation]

What the NDP is asking for is completely reasonable. We simply want people who work full time to earn a decent living.

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

I would like to read today's opposition motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should reinstate the federal minimum wage and increase it incrementally to \$15 per hour over five years.

A picture may be worth 1,000 words, but we believe that numbers speak for themselves, and there is no shortage of numbers to support the NDP's position. According to Statistics Canada, the weighted average minimum wage of all the provinces is \$10.14 per hour. Accordingly, after working 40 hours a week, every week, an employee will earn the amazing annual salary of \$21,000—before taxes, of course.

• (1620)

[English]

In 2013, in the province of Quebec, the average rent was about \$700 a month. It will actually reach near \$920 for the rest of the country. As for groceries, the average Canadian family spends approximately \$400 a month, which is the equivalent of a weekly salary for a minimum wage paid employee, not to mention the cost of clothing, transportation, and electricity. I would also mention leisure, but at this point it is very improbable that there is any money left for enjoyment.

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[Translation]

The poverty line in Quebec is \$22,000 per year. What the Conservatives are telling us right now is that it is okay, it is normal even, for someone who works 40 hours every week to live below the poverty line. According to the Conservatives, it is normal for someone to have to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet.

In my riding, the problem is very serious. Food banks can no longer keep up with the demand. I hosted my annual barbecue last Sunday and many young people came out to eat hot dogs. What really saddened me was that at 3 or 4 p.m., at the end of the event, there was a line of young people asking for the leftover sausages and buns. What we are asking for is not for all Canadians. We are talking about employees under federal jurisdiction. Those people at least should be entitled to earn a decent living. This would affect private sectors under federal jurisdiction. This includes the transportation, broadcasting, banking and telecommunications sectors.

At this time, one-eighth of employees in these sectors under federal jurisdiction earn less than \$15 an hour. A large proportion of them therefore live very close to the poverty line. For a country like Canada, it is not too much to ask for a full-time worker to be able to live well above the poverty line.

[English]

The last years have not been painted with austerity. The government is constantly, or at least claims it is constantly, looking for ways to boost the economy. Here is one: correct the mistakes made by the past Liberal government and reinstate the federal minimum wage. The math simply needs to be done. An average day at work is about eight hours. That would be approximately \$200 more per week in the pockets of employees, more money to spend on clothes, food, and activities. More purchasing power is good for the economy.

[Translation]

The NDP's position is in fact strongly supported by leading economists, many of whom are actually examining the impact of the minimum wage on employment. Nothing seems to indicate that an increase could have a negative impact on the labour market, especially if it is just a slight increase. We can therefore be reassured. A \$5-increase over five years will not disrupt the Canadian economy, as the Conservatives are trying to claim today.

Employees who are very familiar with their company, with its policies, products and services, are knowledgeable employees. Training new workers takes time and costs money. In this light, raising the minimum wage can even improve productivity since it can help reduce the turnover rate. Along the same lines, employees who manage to provide for themselves with only one job have more energy for that job than those who need to have two or three other jobs.

[English]

The Conservatives will probably say that many small companies will go bankrupt or will face enormous difficulties if the minimum wage is increased because they will not be able to cope with employees' salaries. However, if we proceed on an incremental and moderate basis, these companies will have time to plan and adapt to that situation. Furthermore, most businesses that deal with federally

regulated sectors are large businesses that can benefit from a degree of regulatory protection therefore they will be able to adjust to a gradual increase.

[Translation]

Canadians have spoken. They are opposed to blatant social inequalities, and they want people who work full time and pay taxes to be able to make a decent living.

One way to achieve this objective is to reinstate the federal minimum wage and to gradually bring it up to \$15 per hour. The NDP has listened to Canadians; it is time the government did the same.

I would like to end my speech by once again quoting those who have supported us since we made this announcement. Sheila Block, an economist at Wellesley Institute, said: "Regular and predictable increases in the minimum wage will be good for workers and employers. Wages will no longer be eroded by inflation and increases will not be left to the uncertainty of political decisions". Economists Nicole Fortin, David Green, Thomas Lemieux, Kevin Milligan and Craig Riddell also said that "minimum wages are particularly important as a wage floor for women and young workers."

We are standing up for the people who have the hardest time finding work. In my riding, many people come to see me. I am fortunate to have an office in a building that also houses the local employment centre, the youth employment centre and the CEDC, which helps people write their resumé and get into the job market. The people who come to my office to ask for help are women and young people who cannot get a first job. Even if they do get one, they are being asked to work for ridiculously low wages.

Here is how the NDP sees it: people who get jobs will earn an income that is above the poverty line. These people will be able to reinvest in the economy. They will be able to work a single job. Instead of having two or three jobs and working weekdays, evenings and weekends, they will be able to look after their kids. These people will be able to get involved in their community and have a decent lifestyle.

It might be fine for a twenty-year-old student to earn a low hourly wage, but at 30, 40 or 50, people want a certain degree of comfort. That is what we are offering. I am very proud of my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who moved this motion in the House today. It would be nice if all of the parties could see what this would bring to the Canadian economy and Canadians' quality of life.

I hope that we will have enough time to persuade our colleagues. This is the right thing to do, and I hope that we will succeed. There is no doubt that, when the NDP is in power, this is the kind of measure it will bring in.

•(1625)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus in our youth and on a fairly blunt instrument in achieving what the NDP is trying to achieve, while things like the working income tax benefit and other measures would be much more appropriate.

The NDP has certainly expressed concerns over the increase in unpaid internships, but there are studies out there. British Columbia amalgamated a number of different studies that happened over 30 years into one study. It indicated that as the minimum wage went up, the impact on youth was anywhere from a 6.9% to a 30% decrease in jobs. Therefore, this will significantly impact youth. The study also showed that the majority of those working in minimum wage jobs, over 80%, lived at home with their families.

What is the NDP suggesting we do about the profound impact that this would have on youth and the unemployment rate?

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. We certainly want to help young people earn a decent wage on their first job.

My colleague spoke about youth employment. Surely it is not the only option, but it is better than creating a bunch of jobs and making young people work for \$10 an hour. During our time here, the Conservatives have been giving visas to temporary foreign workers. This would be a good thing to talk about in terms of putting our young people to work.

We could open a dialogue to find the best ways to put young people to work. The hon. member mentioned unpaid internships, something the NDP has taken a position on. However, we are talking about linking decent wages to jobs under federal jurisdiction. That is what the issue is. I hope the young people working those jobs will earn a decent wage. That is my answer to my colleague.

•(1630)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member started off her comments, as many of her colleagues have done throughout the day, by saying that it was a mistake for the federal Liberal government back in the 1990s to get rid of the federal minimum wage. What the member does not tell people is that the New Democratic Party actually supported the government of the day, the Liberal Party in terms of getting rid of the minimum wage.

Is the member even aware of that fact? If she is, maybe she could tell us why at that time the NDP actually supported the Liberal party in getting rid of the minimum wage.

The other thing is that in Manitoba the minimum wage is at \$10.45. The NDP have been in government there for over 14 years. I am wondering if the member believes that the NDP government in Manitoba should be looking at increasing its minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Business of the House

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

I did, indeed, know that, but does he know that the federal minimum wage was frozen at \$4 an hour for 10 years? Instead of tackling the problem and increasing the minimum wage, the Liberals decided to get rid of it, as they often do.

I do not know why some NDP MPs voted for that. I was not around at that time. They voted to eliminate it because this ensured that minimum wages would go up. That is what happened. The government of the time should have realized that the \$4 minimum wage needed to be raised. Eliminating the minimum wage instead of raising it was one way of hiding the problem. It is quite simple.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you shall find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows: Mr. MacKenzie (Oxford) for Mr. Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you shall also find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Thursday, September 18, 2014, at the expiry of the time provided for Question Period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Business of Supply

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on this question because I think it is fundamental to the question of who we are as a nation. The question we are really dealing with is this. Should not those who go to work every day and work hard be able to earn enough to provide a decent life for themselves and their families? It is a simple question.

What we have seen over the last 30 years under the Liberals and Conservatives is increasing income inequality in this country, where the top are paid more and more and the bottom, those who live on the minimum wage, have had no real increase.

The Broadbent Institute, in 2012, clearly demonstrated that 14% of all income now goes to the top 1% in this country, up from only 8% in the 1980s. Therefore, the rich have gotten richer in terms of their incomes and for the poor there has been very little change, 1¢ over the last 30 years in the real value of minimum wages. What that leads to is inequality in wealth. If one does not have the income, then one cannot acquire assets.

In September, the Broadbent Institute issued a report called “Haves and Have-Nots”. I have to say that it is the shame of my province of British Columbia to be the most unequal province in Canada, where the top 10% own 56.2% of all assets, including pensions. That is 10% of the population with over half of all the assets one can own in the province, while the bottom 50%, that is half the people in my province, own only 3.1% of the assets. We clearly have a serious inequality problem in this country.

When Canadian academics like Keith Banting and John Myles have studied this phenomena of increasing inequality, they found there were two factors at work. One was the deliberate cutbacks in social spending and transfers first started by the Liberals and continued by the Conservatives. These were programs that originated in a design to help correct the market inequalities that came about. However, they also pointed to something that was even more serious, and that is the increasing divergence in family incomes and especially low family incomes for those stuck at the bottom.

I am also pleased to rise to talk about the issue today because of my own personal long involvement with this issue. As a councillor in the municipality of Esquimalt, I was proud to sponsor a living wage policy, making Esquimalt one of only two living wage communities in British Columbia, the other being New Westminster.

I have to admit that my proposal to adopt a living wage provoked a vigorous debate. Often those opponents focused on the question of who actually deserves more money. I think we are hearing a bit of that from the other side in here today, talking about people who live at home maybe not being deserving of a fair wage, that youths do not

need higher wages because they are subsidized by their parents or that seniors going back to work after retirement do not need a decent wage because they are just supplementing their pensions. Though shocking, when confronted with the fact that most of the minimum wage workers are women, we get close to those old pin money arguments, that somehow women do not need to earn a fair wage because they are not really the primary breadwinners.

Opponents locally, at the municipal level, tried to focus on the minimal direct impact. Again, it is scarily consistent with what we have seen here today, both the Liberals and Conservatives are saying that there are only 400 people who would benefit from this, but what we know is that they are both deliberately misunderstanding the statistics. The number that would actually benefit from this is not those who are directly in federal employment, that is admittedly quite small, but those who are in the private sector within federal jurisdiction. We know that, of those workers, 40,000 earn less than \$12.49 an hour and 100,000 earn less than \$15 an hour.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out some real workers who are dealing with this.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers is seeking a first contract with a company called Adecco, which employs people in the customs centres in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto. The original contract offer from this private sector employer in the federal jurisdiction is \$11.66 an hour by 2017. Therefore, it is not true that this is window dressing. There are more than 100,000 Canadians who would benefit from an increase to \$15. That is a lot of people for whom this would make a real difference in their lives.

The question of what is a living wage was also raised locally. Why do we talk about these very large numbers? Some of the Liberals have been asking us today who we consulted with. There has been a broad-based popular movement in British Columbia and other provinces led by community social planning councils who sat down with business, labour and poverty advocates to determine what it takes to support a family.

● (1635)

In greater Victoria, the figure they came to, including business involvement, was that it required \$18.93 per hour to provide the basics of food, clothing, shelter, child care and transport, and nothing else: no holidays, no savings for retirement, no savings for kids' educations, no servicing credit cards, and nothing if one has to deal with disabilities or elder care. That is \$18.93 per hour when the minimum wage is \$10.25. Therefore, more than double the minimum wage is what is required to live with the dignity that people who go to work every day and work hard deserve in this country.

Business of Supply

Who earns the minimum wage? It is the same argument today that I heard at the council level, that it is really not very many people and they are mostly young people. The first thing we have to recognize is that it is disproportionately women who earn minimum wage. There are more than one million minimum wage earners in this country and over 60% of those are women. Only a total of 4.3% of men earn the minimum wage, but 7.2% of women workers are at the minimum wage. That rises to 24% of women in the age group between 15 and 24, so one-quarter of young women work at the minimum wage.

A lot of these jobs involve things that we traditionally regard as women's work, so someone who is a cleaner, does cooking or does serving. If they do that at home, their contribution to the economy is not recognized at all, but if they do it in paid work, they get low pay because we think of that as women's work. It does not matter if it is actually a women doing the cleaning or not. Everybody who does cleaning in this country tends to be paid at the minimum wage level.

Youth make up another large group. It is true that over half of all the minimum wage workers are young in this country. That is over 500,000 people. We heard a lot of moralizing about whether youth actually need a living wage or not, the conclusion being that they tend to live in their parents' basements and are subsidized by their parents, forgetting that youth are trying to get a start in life, trying to pay for their educations. They are not all lazy slackers living in their parents' basements by choice. Some of them are forced to live there because they have no other alternative.

As one young woman who testified at our hearings in Esquimalt said, she was still looking for that store that had a student price for milk and a minimum wage price for eggs. They pay the same prices the rest of us pay while earning only a minimum wage.

Most surprising to me, which I learned when I was working on this at the council level, was that workers over the age of 55 make up nearly 10% of all minimum wage workers. That means there are over 100,000 Canadians over the age of 55 working full time and living in poverty; 4.5% of women over 55 who work earn only the minimum wage, and 3.6% of men.

The other argument we heard, and it was just repeated in this chamber and it was repeated at the municipal level, is the false job losses argument. It has been made here today and I am sure we will hear it again and again. Most businesses are in a situation where labour is only one factor in their costs. High rents, high credit card transaction fees, and a host of other costs, not just labour, determine what prices they have to charge in the market.

The real world simply does not support the theory that there will be youth job losses or job losses of any kind. In fact, in the last year, 13 states in the U.S. increased their minimum wages, five through legislation and eight through indexing. Job growth was 1.8% in the 13 states that increased their minimum wage, and 1.5% in the 37 states that did not increase their minimum wage. Therefore, there is higher growth in jobs with a higher minimum wage.

As for wages, let us look at the other part of it. People say it will reduce hours and people will take home less money in the end. In those 13 states in the U.S., wages grew by 1%, and in the 37 states with no increase, 0.1%, so 10 times the wage growth in those states that increased the minimum wage.

What happens if we keep the minimum wage below a living wage? Who actually picks up those costs, because these people are still alive and they are still getting by? Obviously they are costs borne by the workers in terms of living in substandard housing, suffering poor health, or facing poverty in retirement because they are unable to save. However, the public also picks up a lot of those costs, in effect subsidizing those low wages through increased demand for social housing, increased demand for provincial social services.

Charities and faith communities have assumed a large part of those costs in running food banks and shelters, and of course kids pay a big price. British Columbia has the highest child poverty rate at 18%, and one-third of those kids living in poverty are living in a family where at least one parent works full time.

• (1640)

This is not a trivial motion. It is not a housekeeping motion. It is motion about who we are as Canadians and whether we really believe that those who go to work and work hard deserve a living wage.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. There is a great deal of merit to many of the comments. I was interested when he made reference to Victoria and that living wage. He suggested that close to \$19 is what it would take to have a livable minimum wage in Victoria.

Where did they come up with the \$15? Is that something that was based on B.C.? Where did the \$15 rate come from, as opposed to what he was suggesting, which is that a more appropriate amount might be closer to \$18 or \$19 an hour?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, there has been a nationwide campaign for raising the minimum wage across the country to \$15 an hour, so it is not just an idea we suddenly had in the middle of the night. It is something people have been calling for and working for across the country.

I know that a figure of \$18.93 sounds large, but again, as I stressed in my speech, that is just the amount for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and child care. That is the amount each parent in a two-parent family would have to earn so that a family of four could live beyond poverty and participate in our society in the most basic way.

Yes, it sounds big. What we have said, as far as this motion is concerned, is that we would start with a raise to \$12 and phase it in to \$15 over five years. The economists show that when we do that, there is no effect in terms of job losses.

Business of Supply

•(1645)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I thank my colleague for his passion and his desire to see people living on a good wage. However, again, I have to say that we have used a very blunt instrument with unintended consequences, when other options would probably be more effective.

I have a couple of questions. The member talked about hundreds of thousands of people, and certainly both the Liberals and Conservatives have referenced the numbers that we believe would be impacted, and they are certainly significantly low. Could the member give the reference in terms of hundreds of thousands and where that is actually coming from?

The other piece is that the literature I have read has consistently talked about the negative impact. This is from economists across the country. Many studies have said that actually we could be hurting the people we are intending to help the most in terms of job availability. Could the member speak to those issues?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for her questions. She and I have always had good exchanges.

With respect, the difference between the numbers you are talking about and we are talking about is that you are talking about those people who work directly in the public sector. What we are talking about is those who work in the private sector, which is federally regulated.

When it comes to the job impacts, I know that you are citing some studies, primarily the Fraser Institute study, I suspect, but let us actually look at what economists have said.

David Card and Alan Krueger, in a basic study in the United States, said, “We find no indication that the rise in the minimum wage reduced employment”.

Most recently, John Schmitt, of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, said:

The employment effect of the minimum wage is one of the most studied topics in all of economics.... The weight of that evidence points to little or no employment response to modest increases in the minimum wage.

It is an unfounded fear that jobs would actually disappear. The data I cited in my speech show that U.S. states that raised the minimum wage had a net increase in their gross domestic product and a net increase in their employment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I just want to remind all hon. members to address all of their questions and comments directly to the Chair. I know it is the first week back after the summer, but the Chair would appreciate the members' co-operation in this regard.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Don Valley West.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the motion proposed by the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie in regard to minimum wages. Today I would like to reassure the hon. member that our government's top priority remains focused on creating jobs and economic growth

while ensuring that all Canadians have the opportunity to share in the benefits of a strong economy.

Contrary to what the official opposition may believe, most Canadians are becoming wealthier. The median net worth of Canadian families has increased by 45% in real terms since 2005. The federal tax burden is now the lowest it has been in 50 years. Now more than one million low-income Canadians have been removed from the tax rolls and do not have to pay federal income tax.

Canadians in all major income groups have seen increases of about 10% or more in their real after-tax, after-transfer income since 2006. Income inequality has not increased in Canada since 2006, and the share of Canadians living in low-income families is at its lowest level in three decades. Clearly, these actions are paying off for Canadians, including those with lower incomes.

Given my limited time today, I would like to focus members' attention on what our government's economic action plan has done to reduce taxes for Canadian families since we took office in 2006.

Unlike the official opposition, Canadians know that when it comes to tax reduction, the Conservative government has a long-standing record of outstanding achievement. Since 2006, Canadians have benefited from significant broad-based tax cuts introduced by our government. These tax reductions have given individuals and families more flexibility to make the choices that are right for them. These initiatives have helped build a solid foundation for future economic growth, more jobs, and higher living standards for all Canadians.

The evidence is clear, even if some other hon. members steadfastly choose to ignore it. An average Canadian family of four will pay close to \$3,400 less in taxes in 2014.

Under our government's long-term agenda to keep taxes low, significant broad-based action has been taken to reduce taxes for all Canadians. This includes a reduction in the GST rate to 5% from 7%; an increase in the amount that all Canadians can earn without paying federal income tax; a reduction in the lowest personal income tax rate to 15% from 16%; and the introduction of the tax-free savings account, or TFSA, a flexible, registered, general purpose savings vehicle that allows Canadians to earn tax-free investment income to more easily meet their lifetime savings needs.

Our government has also introduced a number of targeted tax reduction measures. For example, we have helped families with children by introducing the child tax credit, the children's fitness tax credit, and the children's arts tax credit. We have introduced the registered disability savings plan to help individuals with severe disabilities and their families save for their long-term financial security. We have enhanced support for caregivers to infirm, dependent family members by introducing the family caregiver tax credit.

We have provided additional annual targeted tax relief for seniors and pensioners by increasing the age credit and the pension income credit amounts, raising the age limit for maturing savings in registered pension plans and registered retirement savings plans, and introducing pension income splitting.

Business of Supply

We have provided further support to students and their families by exempting scholarship income from taxation, introducing the textbook tax credit, and making registered education savings plans more responsive to changing needs.

Last, we have introduced the public transit tax credit to encourage public transit use.

At the same time, we have increased and enhanced benefits for Canadian families and individuals by introducing the universal child care benefit, introducing and enhancing the working income tax benefit, and increasing the amount of income families can earn before the national child benefit supplement is fully phased out and before the Canada child tax base benefit begins to be phased out. Last, we have maintained the GST credit level while reducing the GST rate by two percentage points.

• (1650)

Mr. Speaker, I neglected to mention that I will be sharing my time today with the member for Willowdale. I apologize for the delay on that.

In total, our government will have provided almost \$160 billion in tax relief for Canadian families and individuals over a six year period ending in 2013-2014.

As all members of the House can see, if they choose to do so, our government is committed to lower taxes for all Canadians. Our recent budgets have built upon our record of supporting families and communities while establishing a path for returning to balanced budgets.

Economic action plan 2013 introduced enhanced support for Canadian families by keeping taxes low; better recognizing the costs of adopting a child; helping to lower the price of consumer goods; better protecting financial consumers, including seniors; and promoting low-cost and secure pension options.

It also introduced measures to support communities by investing in quality affordable housing, honouring our veterans, improving the health of Canadians, supporting our arts and cultural community, and creating the largest and longest federal investment in job creating infrastructure in Canadian history.

Economic action plan 2014 continues to focus on controlling spending and using every tax dollar as efficiently as possible. We will enshrine our responsible, prudent approach in law with the introduction of balanced budget legislation. Balancing our books, as all business leaders know, gives us greater flexibility to respond to the unforeseen. It would enable us to reduce the burden placed on future generations and would promote investment by keeping taxes low.

Let me conclude by saying that I am very optimistic about our prospects as a nation. The Canadian economy continues to expand, enjoying one of the strongest job creation records in the G7. Over 1.1 million more Canadians are working now than at the end of the recession, with the vast majority of new jobs being full-time, high-wage, private sector positions.

However, while all our jobs and growth performance is encouraging, we still have work to do. I believe that economic

action plan 2014 is the way to go. If we hold to the course we have chosen, our future looks bright. I am eager to see this progressive agenda unfold and the positive impact it will have on our country and jobs and growth, which is why I cannot support the motion.

• (1655)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this has been an engaging debate today, on all sides. That is something we appreciate after coming through last year, when the New Democratic Party had to usually carry the ball here when it came to making speeches.

The point I want to make, very quickly, is that there is an inequity that has occurred with the minimum wage across Canada. Over the last 40 years, we have seen a zero increase in the real wages for minimum wage. In that same time, the average real wage increase for the rest of Canadians was over 15%. What has happened is that the minimum wage workers have lost position in society over the last 40 years in comparison to other workers, yet they make up a large and very important part of our workforce.

By accepting this motion, by re-establishing a minimum wage that is reflective of the conditions other workers come under, we are creating equity in the country that needs to be there. Would my colleague not agree that equity is an important principle that guides our fair and honest country?

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and congratulate him on his new official riding.

Yes, I do agree that equity is important, but it is also important, as we have heard today in debate among all parties, that the numbers in question are somewhat dubious. In fact, one of my colleagues' colleagues on the opposite side, for lack of a better term, agreed that this motion was purely symbolic.

We, as a government, are in support of provincial jurisdiction, which has the authority over establishing minimum wage, as I have seen in my own province. The new government in Ontario has recently established new guidelines for minimum wage. That is its jurisdiction, and we endorse and support that as its responsibility. To that end, we believe that is the route the federal government must take in order to support our provincial cohorts.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's statement and my mind rolled over numbers that put a completely different picture to it.

Business of Supply

In the very city that the member opposite represents, the waiting list for public housing has practically doubled since the current government took office and the number of children living in poverty has increased. The member's statement today, in fact, explained exactly how government policy from across the House is plunging seniors and people with disabilities who live in co-operative housing into poverty as rent subsidies disappear as a direct result of decisions by this government. Poverty is on the rise in the very city the member represents.

The concern I have is the perception that somehow a tax cut for a person earning high wages suddenly creates income or opportunity for people who are struggling. I recognize that the members opposite do not want to measure these things, but the measurements are there.

How does that work? Can he please explain it to me?

• (1700)

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. This is my first opportunity to welcome him to the House.

Yes, we both come from Toronto in Ontario, where these are significant issues. As my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, alluded to earlier, we would all like to eradicate poverty. We would all like to find solutions to that issue that will help those in need, but at the end of the day we have to do it through incentive and opportunity. We create jobs. We create economic growth.

In answer to my colleague, an apprenticeship incentive grant is an opportunity for apprentices to increase their skill set and help them improve their ability to not only earn a wage but earn a higher wage. That is the important piece of this puzzle, and that is what this government clearly sets as a standard.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House and also to be the last speaker on this issue of minimum wage.

We have heard today about our government's outstanding record of achievement with respect to creating jobs and economic growth. I would like to dedicate my time to exploring in more detail how we are building on these results by helping to connect Canadians with available jobs.

Despite our excellent employment performance, our government is constantly looking for ways to make it even better, and we find it unacceptable that many Canadians are out of work or underutilized at a time when skills and labour shortages are emerging in certain sectors and regions. Indeed, many employers agree with us and continue to identify the shortage of skilled labour as an impediment to growth. In fact, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce lists skills shortages as the number one barrier to Canada's competitiveness.

Faced with this challenge, we have taken effective and concrete action to support the development of a skilled, mobile, and productive workforce.

To begin, let me go back to budget 2007, when our government introduced the working income tax benefit, or WITB. The WITB fulfilled our government's commitment to help make work more rewarding to low-income Canadians already in the workforce and

increased the incentive for other low-income Canadians to enter the workforce.

Economic action plan 2009 went even further by effectively doubling the benefits provided under the WITB. Today this initiative is making a real difference in the lives of Canadians. It has lowered the welfare wall so that low-income individuals now keep more of their earnings. In 2013, over \$1.1 billion in WITB benefits were provided to individuals and families.

Recognizing that families are the cornerstone of our society, economic action plan 2011 took action to further reduce the tax burden on hard-working Canadian families. In doing so, we recognized that some families need additional support. For example, many Canadians have assumed added responsibilities in caring for infirm parents or other family members. These family caregivers make special sacrifices, often leaving the workforce temporarily and forgoing employment income.

In support of these families who care for infirm dependants, economic action plan 2011 introduced the family caregiver tax credit, which came into effect in 2012. This 15% non-refundable credit on an amount of \$2,058 in 2014 provides additional tax relief for caregivers of all types of infirm dependent family members, including, for the first time, spouses, common-law partners, and minor children.

To further help caregivers, economic action plan 2011 removed the \$10,000 limit on the amount of eligible expenses a taxpayer can claim under the medical expense tax credit for a financially dependent relative.

We also established the registered disability savings plan, or RDSP, based on the recommendations of the 2006 expert panel on financial security for children with severe disabilities. The RDSP is designed to help individuals with severe disabilities and their families save for their long-term financial security.

Since its implementation in 2008, our government has made a number of improvements to the program. For example, to make sure that RDSP beneficiaries with a shortened life expectancy can access their savings, economic action plan 2011 provided them with more flexibility to withdraw their RDSP assets without requiring the repayment of Canada disability savings grants and Canada disability savings bonds.

In 2011 our government launched a review of the RDSP to ensure that RDSPs are meeting the needs of Canadians with severe disabilities and their families. Based on the feedback received during the review, economic action plan 2012 announced a number of measures to improve the RDSP.

Business of Supply

These measures provided greater access to RDSP savings for small withdrawals, gave greater flexibility to make withdrawals from certain RDSPs and ensure the RDSP assets were used to support a beneficiary during their lifetime, enhanced flexibility for parents who save in registered education savings plans for children with disabilities, introduced greater continuity for beneficiaries who cease to qualify for the disability tax credit in certain circumstances, and improved the administration of the RDSP for financial institutions and beneficiaries.

● (1705)

More than 81,000 RDSPs have been opened since they became available in 2008. Thanks to a measures like the RDSP, our government is making sure Canadians with disabilities get the support they need.

Let me now say a few more words about the government's tax reductions for seniors and pensioners. On this subject I once again have plenty of material to draw from.

Our government increased the age credit amount by \$1,000 in 2006 and by another \$1,000 in 2009. We doubled the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit to \$2,000. We introduced pension income splitting and increased the age limit for maturing pensions and RRSPs to 71 from 69 years of age. As a result of these actions, seniors and pensioners are receiving about \$2.8 billion in additional annual tax relief.

Overall, actions taken by this government have substantially increased the income seniors can earn before they are required to pay income tax. In 2014 a single senior can earn at least \$20,054 and a senior couple at least \$40,109 before paying federal income tax.

Seniors and those who support them may also take advantage of tax credits, such as the disability tax credit, the medical expense tax credit, the caregiver credit, and the family caregiver tax credit, which, as I have mentioned, was introduced in economic action plan 2011 and came into effect in 2012.

In the same year our government enhanced the guaranteed income supplement, the GIS, for those seniors who rely almost exclusively on their old age security and the GIS and may therefore be at risk of experiencing financial difficulties. The measure provided a new top-up benefit of up to \$600 annually for single seniors and \$840 for couples, and is improving the financial security of more than 680,000 seniors across Canada.

Finally, let me add that new measures we have introduced recognize that the health of the Canadian economy ultimately depends on providing opportunities for a high quality of life for all Canadians. That is why economic action plan 2014 continues to implement the government's plan for jobs and growth by connecting Canadians with available jobs through helping them to acquire the skills that will get them hired or help them get better jobs; fostering job creation, innovation, and trade by keeping taxes low; reducing the tax compliance burden; continuing to provide Canadian businesses and investors with the market access they need to succeed in the global economy; and supporting families and communities by taking additional steps to protect Canadian consumers, keeping taxes low for families, and improving the safety of Canadians.

Keeping taxes low is an important element of our economic action plan. It helps Canadians succeed in the global economy through the creation of high-quality jobs and greater opportunities for success.

Economic action plan 2014 is the next chapter in our government's long-term plan to strengthen the Canadian economy in an uncertain world and create jobs and growth while keeping taxes low for families and businesses and balancing the budget in 2015.

Taken together, the measures our government has introduced since 2006 and those in economic action plan 2014 will continue to keep taxes low and help Canadians succeed in the global economy, creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

In the deliberations prior to my speaking, we talked a lot about the macro aspect of the minimum wage. A \$5 increase over the Canadian average of \$10 or \$11 means a 50% increase. Divided over the five years that are recommended, that is a 10% increase a year. That is quite significant.

Let me address this issue from a micro point of view and as a former business owner for 20 years. If the minimum wage were to increase by 10% a year, I would not hire additional staff. I would not pass it. I would have to keep my costs down to run my business.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to defend the motion moved by my esteemed colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. This motion focuses directly on improving the quality of life of thousands of workers under federal jurisdiction.

We realize that the members across the way only defend the employers, but there needs to be balance in our society. The federal minimum wage has not been increased in 40 years. There needs to be a balanced perspective.

I cannot say that the small tax credit handouts my colleague referred to truly help the workers in my riding who are living in poverty earning minimum wage.

Those are the workers I am defending today and every worker across the country could benefit from this, because it will definitely have an impact on the provinces.

[*English*]

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, if I look at this purely on the microeconomic scale as an employer, if the wages were competitive internationally or competitive within Canada and there were a growth aspect in the economy, I would absolutely hire more workers.

Business of Supply

If we allow our economy to grow with more free trade around the world, and every dollar that we export translates to five dollars of domestic GNP, that is how I would look at improving our economy and the lot of our citizens.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke briefly about his experience as a business owner in the Toronto area. I wonder if he could talk a little about where those costs would have to be paid from, should a wage increase happen in a business. How does he see that money coming into his business to compensate for the new money that he would have to pay out?

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Mr. Speaker, ultimately government action in deciding minimum wage, as my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, has mentioned, is a very blunt instrument. It is like using a tennis racket to swat a fly.

The only way that a business person would increase jobs is if the economy is stimulated with tax credits and the business owner is encouraged to invest in production equipment or obtain a lower cost of production. As the cost of production is increased, the cost is simply passed on to the end price, which therefore increases the inflationary rate in the economy and makes it more difficult for everybody to earn a living wage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for this debate has expired.

Pursuant to an order made earlier today, the question on the motion is deemed to have been put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Thursday, September 18, 2014, at the expiry of the time provided for question period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I believe the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue is rising on a point of order.

●(1715)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I believe there has been agreement among all the parties to unanimously see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the House agree to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[For continuation of proceedings see part B]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 16, 2014
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 16, 2014

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

RESPECTING FAMILIES OF MURDERED AND BRUTALIZED PERSONS ACT

The House resumed from May 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-587, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (increasing parole ineligibility), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for Charlottetown, outlined in considerable detail the Liberal Party position on this, another private member's bill from a government backbencher, or the government side of the House, that we believe leads to a completely disjointed approach to amending the Criminal Code.

Bill C-587 would amend the Criminal Code to increase the parole ineligibility from 25 years to a maximum of 40 years for persons convicted of the abduction, sexual assault and murder of the same victim. The short title of the act is the respecting families of murdered and brutalized persons act.

I believe this to be another initiative by the Conservative backbench to weaken the coherence of the Criminal Code of Canada.

The hon. member in whose name this bill resides is introducing a bill that, in my view, is a solution in search of a problem. If one were to be overly cynical, this private member's bill is a solution in search of a fundraising letter.

The member will know that much of what his political party is really concerned with is raising money from its political base on the subject of choice. That subject seems to be one that is enamoured with “get tough on crime” but certainly not “get smart on crime”.

This is not unlike the Conservative approach to veterans in Canada, an approach where symbolism is more important than substance. We saw reports just the other night that the Minister of Veterans Affairs is spending another \$4 million on self-promoting ads, all the while continuing to ignore the real problem affecting our veterans.

I read the minister's speech, and while the hon. member might have good intentions, I again repeat that the legislation is a solution in search of a problem. In his speech, we heard a lot of rhetoric about the need to be tough on criminals. Absent from his speech, and the

Speaker would know this, is any discernible connection between his bill and what we refer to on our side as “evidence and facts”.

Allow me to raise a couple of points of serious concern. These issues surround the legality and constitutionality of this legislation and what assurances can be provided to the House as to whether the government's private member's bill meets those basic requirements.

In that regard, I would like to place on the record that, speaking today for the Liberal Party, we will expect that the member sponsoring this bill will table with the House or with the committee examining the bill a written legal opinion as to the fact that this bill would withstand legal or constitutional challenges.

If the member is unable to provide such written legal opinion, I would direct this request to the government itself, to have the Department of Justice examine this legislation and produce a legal opinion that declares that the bill would withstand a legal or constitutional challenge.

I say that should be done before the committee hears witnesses. We have heard members say that it is not possible, but that is what the committee needs.

My experience on the public safety committee is that a Conservative backbench member introduces a private member's bill, and witnesses are called in on the private member's bill. The witnesses believe that the bill is as was outlined originally.

● (1720)

After the hearings are basically over, on the last day of the hearings, the Department of Justice, or in our case, the Department of Public Safety, comes in with a series of amendments, and there are usually more amendments than there are clauses in the bill.

I submit that on two of the bills—and I have put this to you before, Mr. Speaker—the intent was really changed, but the witnesses do not know the bill was really changed. They appeared on a bill that was substantially amended by the Department of Justice because the Department of Justice is trying to make it so that it is not legally or constitutionally challenged. However, the witnesses actually believe that what was passed was what they submitted on. The private member from the Conservative backbench, of course, carries on the spin that they really did what the original bill intended, which in my case at the public safety committee certainly did not happen.

Private Members' Business

I said earlier that the bill is a solution in search of a problem. Let us look at one of the facts. Bill C-587 would increase the ineligibility for parole for a conviction that includes a sentence of kidnapping, sexual assault and murder. In the last 20 years there have been only three cases in Canada that would meet the three elements of kidnapping, sexual assault and murder. Let me repeat, there were just three cases that would have triggered the provisions of Bill C-587 had it been in place 20 years ago. In those three cases there is no indication that the judges acted with leniency.

Mr. James Bezan:—More than that.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite says there were more than that. That member should show us, prove it, give us some facts and give us the legal and constitutional opinion before we hear witnesses.

The concerns I and my colleagues have with this legislation are the following. First, it would eliminate one of the only incentives for a certain class of violent offender to behave well in prison, thereby making prisons more dangerous for inmates and correctional officials. The Conservatives will say we are in favour of these offenders. No, we are not. We are talking about public safety and safety in our prisons. We are talking about making the system work. We are talking about being smart on crime, not just this agenda of taking a little piece here and a little piece there and at the end of the day we will have a disjointed Criminal Code of Canada.

Canadian law already exists to deal harshly with the few persons convicted of kidnapping, sexually assaulting and murdering someone. Such persons receive mandatory life sentences.

Currently, every criminal in Canada becomes eligible for parole after 25 years at the most. The bill would defy common sense by punishing a specific class of murderer more harshly than serial killers and persons who have committed genocide and crimes against humanity.

I just want to raise a couple of points. I had the opportunity this summer to meet a number of times with the folks from the justice centre in the U.S. When they are looking at trying to improve public safety and reduce recidivism, make streets safer and be smart on crime, this is what they say in their publication of April:

A number of those states have responded with “justice reinvestment” strategies to reduce corrections costs, revise sentencing policies, and increase public safety. Justice reinvestment is a data-driven approach that ensures that policymaking is based on a comprehensive analysis of criminal justice data and the latest research about what works to reduce crime.

They go on to say that the biggest return on the investment in public safety comes from not just focusing on incarceration, but treatment programs and supervision priorities on the people likely to commit a future crime.

What I am saying—

Mr. James Bezan: What about the victims' rights?

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, we are not saying—

Mr. James Bezan: What about the families? What about the victims?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the chirping coming from the other side means that clearly they do not want to hear the facts. They do not want to hear what works.

• (1725)

We are saying that we should look at the facts and the evidence. We should have the proper legal and constitutional analysis on the bill before witnesses come before the committee, and then let us analyze the bill in that way.

Let us do something that actually works, rather than just the rhetoric that the minister is chirping across the aisle.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak to the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code contained in the private member's bill before us today. The amendments contained in Bill C-587, the respecting families of murdered and brutalized persons act, introduced by my colleague, the member of Parliament for Okanagan—Shuswap, are based on the same fundamental idea that underlies many recent legislative initiatives passed by Parliament, which is the interests of victims of crime and of their families and loved ones.

That fundamental proposition is a straightforward one. Families and loved ones of murder victims should not become the secondary victims of a convicted murderer by being forced to relive the details of their terrible loss every time the killer applies for parole.

As hon. members may recall from past debates, both first and second degree murder are punishable by life imprisonment, subject to a period set out in section 745 of the Criminal Code, during which the murderer may not apply for parole. While all murders are morally blameworthy, first and second degree murder are distinguished from each other by the higher degree of moral blameworthiness associated with first degree murder that justifies the longer mandatory period of parole ineligibility of 25 years.

While the mandatory minimum period of parole ineligibility for second degree murder is 10 years, it may be increased in two situations.

First, if a second degree murderer has been convicted of a prior murder or of an intentional killing under the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act, the parole ineligibility period will be automatically set for the same as first degree murder, namely 25 years. In such cases, the fact that the murderer has killed before is considered to increase his or her moral blameworthiness up to the level of a first degree murderer.

Second, even if the second degree murderer has not killed before, a judge has the discretion under section 745.4 of the Criminal Code to impose a period of parole ineligibility of up to 25 years based on the murderer's character, the nature and circumstances of the murder, and any jury recommendation in this regard. In short, the higher the degree of moral blameworthiness associated with a second degree murder, the longer the parole ineligibility period that may be imposed to reflect it.

Private Members' Business

It is important to keep the concept of moral blameworthiness in mind when considering the proposals put forward in Bill C-587. These proposals are directed at the most morally blameworthy of murders, those in which the murder victim has also been subjected to an abduction and to a sexual assault by the murderer. It is hard to imagine a more heinous series of acts committed against the victim.

The issue before us today is that, with the exception of the case of multiple murderers, the maximum parole ineligibility period for murder permitted under the Criminal Code is 25 years. This is true, no matter how terrible the circumstances in which the murder may have been committed.

As for multiple murderers, I am aware that in 2011, the Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act came into force. These Criminal Code amendments permit a judge to impose a parole ineligibility period on a multiple murderer for the first murder in accordance with the provisions I have already described. The judge will also be authorized to impose consecutive parole ineligibility periods of 25 years, one for each victim after the first, to ensure that the lives of each and every victim will be reflected in the sentence ultimately imposed upon the murderer.

In short, this important legislation would help to ensure that no victim's life would be discounted at the time of sentencing.

However, the result of the seemingly arbitrary limit on parole ineligibility of 25 years on those who kill once in the circumstances reflected in Bill C-587 is a symbolic devaluation of the suffering of the murder victim, as well as an apparent disregard of the extreme level of moral blameworthiness exhibited by the murderer. One has only to recall the horrible murder of Tori Stafford by Michael Rafferty to realize the truth of this statement.

The member for Malpeque just said that this bill was a solution in search of a problem. I would ask him to review the terrible circumstances of the murder of that young girl, Tori Stafford, and then stand back up in the House and say whether there is no problem that needs to be addressed. This, in my view, addresses this situation and this problem. This problem has, unfortunately, occurred all too often in Canadian history. That is what we get from the moral equivalence of the Liberal Party.

Allow me to be more specific about what Bill C-587 would do.

First, it would amend section 745 of the Criminal Code to require a mandatory parole ineligibility period of 25 years for anyone convicted of murder who had also been convicted of committing one of the listed kidnapping and abduction offences, as well as one of the listed sexual offences against the murder victim. In short, the 25-year period would only apply if the murderer had been convicted of three offences against the same victim. This would ensure that this measure would be applied only against those whose crimes would justify this level of sanction.

• (1730)

Second, the bill would authorize a sentencing judge to replace that 25-year minimum parole ineligibility period with a longer period of up to 40 years based on the character of the offender, the nature and circumstances of the offences and any jury recommendation in this regard.

As I described earlier in the context of second degree murder, these are well-established Criminal Code criteria that permit the judge and jury who have heard the evidence at trial to make this important sentencing decision. Under the existing law, murderers who kidnap and sexually assault their victims already receive long sentences. This would continue to be true under Bill C-587.

However, the bill would also protect families and loved ones of murdered victims from the trauma of repeated parole applications of the murderer. As the hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap said, when he introduced this legislation on April 7, “Sadistic criminals convicted of such heinous crimes are never granted parole, thus the hearings are unnecessary and are extremely painful for the victims’ families to endure”.

I will point out the terrible trauma that the victims of Clifford Olson went through when he had multiple parole hearings, even though we all knew, and he knew, that he would never be released. However, every two years, he would require the families of those victims to appear before a Parole Board hearing to go through and relive the horrible murders of their children over and over again.

In short, the bill is not just about creating stiffer penalties for sadistic murderers by allowing a judge to impose up to 40 years of parole ineligibility on the depraved murderers targeted by these measures. This bill is also about saving the families and loved ones of the victims from having to go through the agony of unnecessary and often traumatic Parole Board hearings.

If the member for Malpeque does not believe there is a problem here that needs to be solved, I would ask him to go and speak to the families of some of these victims and hear about the torture that they go through having to relive the awful circumstances of the murders of their loved ones over and over again. I would refer him to Sharon Rosenfeldt, who is the mother of one of Clifford Olson's victims. Perhaps he should speak to her and hear her point of view on this matter.

This is the fundamental proposition at the heart of the important measures proposed in the bill. It is far too often the case that the families and loved ones of victims experience a greater degree of pain and experience a greater sense of loss because the justice system has failed to protect them from being re-victimized every two years when the murderer applies in vein for parole.

Moreover, Bill C-587 is entirely consistent with past legislation passed by the House, such as the Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act. It ensures that a life sentence of imprisonment for murder means just that: life in prison.

I will point out that in the past the Liberal justice critic has said that if the Liberals were to form a government, they would repeal that law which removed the faint hope clause and they would restore the faint hope clause, allowing murderers like the late Clifford Olson to have those continual Parole Board hearings.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-587 is also entirely consistent with another piece of important legislation that the House is also being asked to examine, Bill C-32, the victims bill of rights act, which was introduced on April 3 of this year. The victims bill of rights would put victims at the heart of the justice system in order to rebalance the scales of justice away from criminals and toward those who have suffered at their hands.

Bill C-587 is yet another example of this long overdue rebalancing. I urge all hon. members to examine it from this point of view. If they do, I am sure they will agree with me that it ought to be moved to the committee and third reading to ensure that it becomes the law of the land in the shortest time possible.

I thank all members for their attention and urge them to come together in the interests of the families and loved ones of the truly horrific crimes targeted by Bill C-587, such as the family of Tori Stafford. I strongly urge all members therefore to give their full support to this bill and ensure its swift passage.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today to Bill C-587 introduced by the hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap. I am also very pleased to learn that there is a place in Canada called Shuswap. I looked it up. It seems like a wonderful place. I hope to visit it one day.

Bill C-587 amends our Criminal Code in order to provide that a person convicted of the abduction, sexual assault and murder of one victim is to be sentenced to imprisonment for life without eligibility for parole until the person has served a sentence of between 25 and 40 years.

I will be honest. Discussions on amending the Criminal Code make me uncomfortable and a bit nervous because I am not a lawyer and I do not claim to understand the full extent of these changes. What is more, at first I did not really understand all these different assaults listed in the bill, as though triple heinous crimes were common currency in Canada. Not only that, but it is as though punishment worthy of that name were missing from the Criminal Code in its current form.

Neither of those is the case. I think I am justified in feeling uncomfortable. I find it strange that a backbench MP has introduced a bill to amend the Criminal Code. I think the Minister of Justice should be responsible for such important changes, to ensure that the bill can be properly studied. This kind of initiative should be much more formal. This all comes across as cavalier, which worries me.

The idea behind this bill is immediately clear when you read it. It is simply an exaggeration, typical Conservative-style hyperbole. They are looking to hand down excessive or double punishments. They appear to believe that this approach will ease the suffering of victims, whose lives have been turned upside down by crime.

The first ombudsman for victims of crime said that this bill was nothing but smoke and mirrors or an empty promise. He said that the measure would be used at most a few times a year, but would change nothing for the families of victims.

This is a foolish move that is taking us back to the Old Testament philosophy of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The victim's role is being made out to be inalienable. The victim becomes this person in need of assistance, whose constant pain serves as proof that justice is about redemption.

Victims are being forced to remain victims, in order to justify never-ending punishments. By exploiting the pain of this serious crime, they are justifying the need for absolute justice. The crime becomes an eternal act to be relived day after day, in order to satisfy the need to punish over and over. By punishing, we are only selling out our own morals.

I would even venture to say that what is behind this type of discussion on the effectiveness of our Criminal Code, and what is at the very heart of this bill, is an irascible belief in the validity of the death penalty. Real justice is hiding behind that.

Our Constitution prevents us from bringing back the death penalty, but the government is constantly trying to get as close as it can. If it cannot execute someone, it will punish the person threefold. It wants to brandish full, irrevocable punishments. Surely that kind of inflexibility will make us feel better.

However, the experts all agree: our judicial system works very well. We do not need to up the ante in such a completely emotional and unenforceable way. Crime is emotional; justice should not be.

The discussion we are having here today is not a new one. In fact, the record is starting to skip. The Conservative Party wants to appeal to its partisan base, so it introduces bombastic bills on victims' rights, and declares a holy war against crime. Immediately, the NDP is stuck preaching moderation and defending the existing rule of law, and then we are accused of being a bunch of whining patsies who want to rehabilitate Satan himself. We are told, "Oh, the NDP is soft on crime" or "Forgive them, they are a bunch of bleeding heart leftists".

The reality is that Canada has very little crime to worry about. Maybe the Conservatives are perhaps confusing Canada with the United States. It would not be the first time. What is the fundamental difference between the United States and Canada? It is precisely the fact that we rehabilitate criminals. The sentimentality of the patsies I just mentioned has helped make Canada one of the safest, most peaceful countries in the world.

The Canadian Bar Association said:

• (1740)

...[It] does not believe that Canadians would benefit from a system where individuals are condemned to spend their entire lives behind bars, with no hope of ever being released. Even those convicted of homicide, the most serious of all crimes, should know there is some slim possibility, after serving lengthy periods of their sentence behind bars, of being released into the community and contributing to society, provided that their behaviour while incarcerated makes them deserving of such a privilege.

Private Members' Business

The most reprehensible notion that would be introduced into the Criminal Code by Bill C-587 is the idea of relativity. Believing that punishment is meted out in an ad hoc manner and that such an indiscriminate criterion has a place in our justice system shows a very poor understanding of that system. Behind it there is the notion that human justice is not enough and that the wrath of God is needed to really vindicate the victims. I am not a lawyer, but I know that the Middle Ages have passed and that the notion of justice has evolved since Spain discovered North America. We are not going to return to outdated practices to please Conservative voters. Justice is a system and not an election platform.

When you remove even the smallest bit of rationality from the justice system, you weaken it. In fact, power is being taken away from judges, who must from now on make decisions based on random concepts. A crime is still a crime. A despicable thing is vile. The only thing that can vindicate us is judicial stability.

How can this notion of seriousness be measured? How can we ensure equality before the law when a notion of relativism is introduced into the equation? I would really like the member for Okanagan—Shuswap to clearly explain that to me. What gap is the bill trying to fill?

At present, in Canada, under Canadian criminal law, it is possible to not be eligible for parole for over 25 years. This is in line with international criminal law. We have adopted the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and this is in keeping with our long tradition as adherents to the rule of law, which is seen around the world as being fair, balanced and exemplary. The Conservatives are systematically damaging that tradition by isolating Canada in the world.

It is deplorable to have to watch our status as mediator crumble because of the actions of this government.

Parole ineligibility is being increased from 25 to 40 years. How will this increase improve our justice system? The only reason to have a sentence like that is as a deterrent, but this is such a rare crime that one would think the laws of civilization would be enough to deter those who might be tempted to kidnap, rape and murder. Yes, these are heinous crimes, but our system already punishes these rare occurrences severely and justly.

This crime is extreme, but that does not mean we need to go to extremes to punish it. It is up to us to be reasonable, not to criminals.

In closing, I will vote against this private member's bill because I think it is time we stopped using victims to make useless changes to our justice system. After all, if the Conservative government wants to make that kind of change to our Criminal Code, all it has to do is introduce a government bill that can be studied as such.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that we will oppose this Conservative bill. This bill does nothing for victims, it is unconstitutional and against the charter, and it threatens the integrity of our justice system.

This is a bad bill that the Conservatives are using just to appeal to their electoral base.

[English]

I have no doubt in my mind that the member for Okanagan—Shuswap felt morally right to bring this forward in the House and I welcome the debate on this subject. It is something that we should debate. I do believe that the government does not do enough for victims and that the member for Okanagan—Shuswap felt he was doing the right thing in presenting the bill to the House to improve victims' rights.

While I do not think the government is doing enough, I do not think this law exactly responds to victims in the way that it should. I believe the member has presented this in good faith, but I also believe that there are electoral purposes to this that he might not have imagined and that the cabinet of his party agrees with.

In all dealings in the House and in society, we hope that things are done with reason and that we are not led by emotion, especially when we are changing or making laws. When members think about murders, such as that of Leslie Mahaffy, and look at the horrific details, they understand the complexity and horror of these awful crimes and are understandably appalled. Our emotions are touched by the disgusting nature of these crimes. However, I do not think what is being presented here will help the victims of these families, because punishment alone is not what helps heal. I think what the member for Okanagan—Shuswap really wanted to do in presenting the legislation was to get to the main problem of repairing the harm done by a crime.

When horrendous murders are committed, there are tremendous harms done to the families of victims but also to society at large. I remember looking at all the details of the Bernardo case. To think that another Canadian could do that to someone is deeply troubling to us as a society, to the families, and I contend that over the passage of time it is troubling to the criminals as well, even though that is not necessarily apparent right at the time of sentencing.

I believe that we have to start going down a road of contemplating how to heal the harm done by a crime. For that, I would like to bring up the concept of restorative justice. It is an idea that is not based on retribution but rather on the healing of all parties, and not just the healing of the criminal, which is often the knee-jerk reaction, that one just cares about the criminals. It is the healing of the families of victims, the healing of society, and hopefully, eventually, the healing of the criminals. When somebody does something horrendous, we hope they will eventually realize that their actions were wrong and seek some sort of redemption for what they have done. New Democrats believe that with the frame of restorative justice, there is that possibility.

There is a famous proverb that says that hate has never been stopped by hating. This is a truth. Hate never stops through hate. In one who hates, hatred never ceases. Hatred is countered by love. In one who loves, hatred eventually ceases. This is a classic proverb that has been with us for over 2,000 years.

Private Members' Business

I can hear members on the other side laughing about this. Perhaps they think that I am naive. I am here to try to better our society, to try to heal victims who have been hurt by crime. I do not laugh at the families of these victims. I think they are deeply hurt inside. Their souls are hurt by what has been done to their loved ones.

• (1745)

In looking at restorative justice, I would like to look at a piece written by Max Fisher in the *The Atlantic Monthly*. He looks at the case of Anders Breivik who killed 77 people in Norway. What happened during Breivik's trial was that he was sentenced to 21 years and it can continue after those 21 years. We can debate the length of the sentence, but the idea is that in Norway there is this idea of restorative justice. In the trial itself the families of the victims were able to testify and share their stories and exchange with each other the damage that was done to them. In so doing, rather than adopting a passive punishment model, those families had the chance to express themselves, how they felt, what the crime did to them, what they lost. They had the solidarity amongst themselves to exchange those stories in a public forum. The fact that it was public allowed Norwegian society to start the healing process.

I am not saying that we should take the model from Norway and just plunk it down here, but I think we should start thinking about these issues carefully. Behind every crime legislation we do, we should be thinking about how we can repair the harm done by a crime. From what I have seen of the Conservative approach, it creates an animosity, with hard on crime, or smart on crime as the Liberals say. I do not actually know what they are talking about when they say smart on crime because they so rarely define their policies on things, but I think we have to get to the heart of the matter, which is how can we reduce the harm done by crime.

Putting someone in jail for 25 years or 40 years will never bring back the loved ones of those families. Those families never had a forum to express themselves during the trial. Because of our system of retribution in the trial system, the families never had the chance to express themselves in a formalized setting and therefore were denied the chance to start the healing process.

I do not believe that just increasing sentences from 25 to 40 years will get to the heart of the harm done by these crimes, because basically the idea is still on the retributive model and still on punishment. In the restorative justice model it is not just about proving or disproving guilt, it is about exorcizing the victim's suffering. I think that is really what the member for Okanagan—Shuswap wanted to do with the bill.

One place we could start is that we could stop demanding that victims go to parole hearings when there is no chance that the perpetrator will get parole. We can change parole legislation instead of sentencing legislation. We can change the forum for parole to make it so that the victims' families do not have to go and relive all the details one more time. I think that would be a better place to start. I suggest the member for Okanagan—Shuswap introduce legislation like this and I would be happy to support it.

The fact is that it is not passive punishment that makes a criminal actively take responsibility for making things right with victims and the community. Once criminals are punished they feel that the sentence has been passed and there is no incentive for them to

rehabilitate. However, in the restorative model, as we see in Norway, the victims have that forum during the trial process to exchange stories and let the criminal truly know how he or she has hurt the families of the victims. I think it is a better model. It causes criminals to think about what they have done, to contemplate it right from the beginning of the process of when they are sentenced and go to prison.

The restorative justice model only works if we do not believe or consider retribution to be its own inherent good. Personally, I do not believe retribution to be its own inherent good. I believe that the reason we separate people from society is to keep society safe but also for those people who have done wrong to contemplate what they have done wrong and to try to make things better.

For those reasons, I will not be supporting the bill at this reading.

• (1750)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):
Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to speak to Bill C-587.

I have a couple of brief comments. I think a few Liberals have already spoken to this bill, and as usual, we are looking at bills being presented by the government more out of a fear factor than anything else. Also as usual, the Liberals have to have a proper balance between two sides.

We are going to be supporting the bill, knowing that it is going to committee. There we can review some of the issues surrounding the changes to the Criminal Code that are proposed in this private members' bill. Private members' bills are usually drafted with limited resources and are limited in scope, so we are hoping that the bill does not go beyond the intended scope, deals with the matters at hand, and does not involve any of the areas where it is not meant to be. Liberals will be trying to improve the bill by making sure that all stakeholders are properly represented and that any amendments that are required are at least considered by the government.

Basically the bill would increase parole ineligibility from 25 years to a maximum of 40 years if a person is convicted of such things as abduction, sexual assault, and murder of the same victim. I am from an accounting background. I am not a lawyer. I do not know how many of these cases are out there, but my understanding is that these situations are limited. Sometimes we get mixed up because headlines tell us of vicious and heinous crimes, but often they have not happened here in Canada. Apparently there are a very limited number of cases in which this sort of thing could be considered an issue here in Canada, but the Conservatives are making a huge issue around it. It is more like fearmongering than fact. That is one of the problems we have with these items.

There were some issues that we thought should be looked at during debate or at committee, and the critic for justice, the member for Charlottetown, has brought them to light already.

Private Members' Business

One problem I see with the bill relates to not providing an individual with hope. I have heard that in a prison atmosphere, some prisoners can make prison life a lot more complicated for people who will not necessarily be spending their whole lifetime in prison. They can make life much more difficult for prisoners who have shorter terms. Giving someone no hope by saying their 25 years is going to go to 40 years is something that should be looked at. I am not sure how all prisons are conducted or how the prisoners are divided, but if some prisoners in a cell block have 25-year sentences and others have less, there are going to be different behaviours in those cell blocks. I hope that will be one of the factors that will be considered.

The second item is that few people are convicted of kidnapping, sexual assault, and murder. We see it in the headlines every day, but usually we see it in countries to the south of us and in other hemispheres. I am hoping that facts about the number of individuals who will be affected by this measure will be considered, as well as whether the additional cost is going to be appropriate.

My understanding is that the laws in Canada already deal harshly with these situations. Perhaps the idea is to change the 25-year minimum for all eligibility situations and just not have judges use the discretion that they presently have in deciding these matters.

● (1755)

Again, we support this measure, and it should be looked at in committee.

Specific classes of murderers are considered more harshly than serial killers or persons who have committed crimes such as genocide or crimes against humanity. Why should one category of crime be treated differently than another category of crime? These are areas we should spend some time looking at, and I hope that members of all parties will be open to doing that at committee.

I will close my remarks by saying again that I hope the bill is constitutionally sound and that the constitutionality of the bill will be looked at during committee hearings. Hopefully all members, especially members on the government side, will be open to hearing from stakeholders and experts on all sides of the spectrum.

● (1800)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in debate on Bill C-587 and to follow my colleague from Montreal, who has spoken very eloquently, as always. He is also a heck of a hockey player and he is kind enough sometimes to drive some of his colleagues to hockey. That is always appreciated.

However, this is not about hockey tonight. It is about a much more serious matter: the question of parole eligibility and the notion of making life a little easier for families of victims of crime. This is an objective that everyone in the House would share, and if we all share the objective, the key is that when we bring forward a piece of legislation, we have to ask ourselves if it will achieve the objective that the mover of the bill has in mind.

The second issue is the fact that the government has tended to bring in a lot of criminal legislation through private members' bills instead of government bills. A private member's bill does not go through the kinds of constitutional checks that a government bill does. When the government brings forward a bill on criminal law,

the normal practice is that the Minister of Justice would have his department examine the constitutionality of that bill to make sure that it complies with, for example, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and would not be found unconstitutional on the grounds of being offside with the charter or on other grounds.

This summer we saw some problems arise with bills that went through the House in the less thorough manner that is given to private members' bills as compared to government bills. We all know that more time is spent debating and examining government bills than is spent on private members' bills, because they are, generally speaking, of a somewhat different nature. Government bills tend to be longer and more detailed, and to some degree usually deal with more substantive matters, although not always.

Here is an issue in which we are considering amendments to the Criminal Code. That is a significant thing, and it seems to me that it ought to be given full and proper consideration.

As my colleague said, we are going to support sending the bill forward to committee to have it examined there. We support the idea of the bill, but it is important that it have thorough examination in committee, because that is not always the case. Certainly my recent experience and my experience since this government has come into power is that committees do not get the ability to perform a thorough study of these matters because the Conservatives, who have the majority on these committees, cut the time allotted for the study of bills to maybe a day or two days.

When I say "a day", I am talking about one meeting of a committee, which is generally two hours. That is not much time to give to these sorts of private members' bills on criminal law, which need proper study to ensure not only that the ends that are sought are achieved but also that the bill works with other elements of the Criminal Code and with other bills that are in the process of being amended. If things conflict in some way, all kinds of problems can be created in the future.

There is no question that we do like the idea of allowing families in cases of egregious crimes to avoid the stress and the horror of having to sit through a parole eligibility hearing every few years for an offender who realistically is never going to get out of prison. I think it is fair to say that a lot of Canadians do not realize that even though we think of the maximum sentence as being 25 years, the maximum sentence in Canada is life. There are people in prison in Canada who are there for the rest of their lives, for actual life, because although after 25 years a person in the worst cases can apply for parole, the fact of the matter is that there are people who do not get it.

● (1805)

Really, the question we are talking about here tonight is this: in the cases of the kinds of people who are not likely to ever get parole, how frequently should a family have to go through the process of worrying about the possibility of that criminal getting eligibility and being paroled? That is obviously a fearful and very worrisome thing. Not only do those families feel revictimized by this process but there is also a concern about what that person might do to someone else. That is a concern we all share as Canadians and as members of the House.

Private Members' Business

We think there are some flaws in this bill that could perhaps be corrected in committee. First of all, it would eliminate one of the only incentives for a certain class of violent offender to behave well in prison. There is a question here about whether taking this particular class of offenders, as opposed to a broader class of serious offenders, is the right way to achieve the objective.

It is also important to think about what eligibility for parole can mean in prison. We know from people who look at these things and from people I have talked to in the past from law enforcement and from prison guards that when we are dealing with offenders in prison, there can be a real difference between the offender who hopes for parole and therefore works toward rehabilitation, which we would all like to see, particularly with those offenders who will someday get out, and the one who has no hope of getting parole. There is a difference in the way they treat other inmates and guards and in terms of the safety of the correctional service guards. We do not want to put those guards in a worse situation.

Moreover, it may be the attitude of the government that anyone who is in prison should rot there, and it may not even think about the question of rehabilitation. However, not every offender is going to be there forever. Some offenders are, in fact, going to get out, so doing whatever we can to support rehabilitation during the period of their incarceration is absolutely vital, especially for those who will get back out into society.

We have seen many cases of offenders who go to prison, do their time, serve their time, and come out and do not commit offences. They become good citizens. We would like to see more of those, and we should always consider what impact a bill might have on that process.

The Deputy Speaker: The author of the bill, the hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap, will now have his five minutes of reply.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues on both sides of the House for their comments. I appreciate them. This is the great thing about our democracy. We have open debate and discuss the issues that concern our citizens. I am also very thankful that I belong to a party that allows backbenchers like me to bring forward issues from my constituents in a private member's bill.

As a person of deep faith, I had some challenges when I first looked at the bill, because my faith is based on confession, repentance, and forgiveness, but I came to the realization that my compassion should not trump justice for the victims.

I talked to a woman in my riding, a wonderful person, Marie Van Diest, who had twin daughters, and one of her daughters was murdered on the rail tracks in Armstrong. When she came to see me to talk to me about justice, she said that she just wanted life to mean life. She did not want to go through parole hearings. She said she was young, and 25 years from now she would still be young, and she did not want to hear this over and over every second year. I came here to represent her, because I agreed with what she had to say.

All the organizations that support victims of crime in this country have come out in support of the bill. I attended a justice round table in Kamloops, and every member around the table was very supportive of the bill.

I am pleased to be here for the second hour of the debate on this private member's bill, and I do thank my colleagues for their comments.

Once again, I thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake for initiating Bill C-587, an act to amend the Criminal Code (increasing parole ineligibility) as Bill C-478 back in February 2013. My bill has merit and will provide guidance and accommodation to our judiciary to further protect victims of violent crimes. This is about victims, not the offenders. My bill would support Bill C-32 in recognition of victims' rights and in protecting victims from the pain they would have to endure as they listened to parole hearings time and time again.

My colleague suggested the Norwegian model. I agreed with that, and we do that in our system, but the victims of crimes do not want to hear that over and over again. They have a healing period of 25 years. They do not want to go through opening up those wounds and reliving the tragedy they experienced in their lives 25 years previously.

The bill targets sadistic murderers. These sadistic criminals have never been granted parole, yet the families of the victims still face parole hearings every two years, reliving once again the tragedies of their loved ones. The bill seeks to extend the parole ineligibility period for those convicted of abduction and heinous and brutal acts of violent or sexual assault ending in the murder of an individual.

Once a parole hearing has been given and denied, almost the whole process starts over again. Making murderers ineligible for parole for up to a maximum of 40 years could save families approximately eight unnecessary parole hearings.

Why does the bill ask for a maximum of 40 years before a parole hearing is allowed? Murder is 25 years without parole. Abduction faces a maximum of 10 years, and sexual assault a maximum of 4.6 years. My bill would empower the courts with the ability to increase parole ineligibility when sentencing individuals who abducted, sexually assaulted, and killed our loved ones from the current 25 years up to a maximum of 40 years.

I am hopeful that the bill will pass second reading and be sent to the justice committee for further comment and further study, but I thank all those who have contributed, and I appreciate the opportunity to present the bill to this House.

• (1810)

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.

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And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, September 15 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 24 immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

SITUATION IN IRAQ

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the situation in Iraq.

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to lead off on this emergency debate, which deals with Canada's military involvement in Iraq. I think it is the essence of democracy that we, as a House, should have the opportunity to debate this rather important subject, given the fact that we are talking about sending some of our Canadian soldiers into harm's way.

What the government has told us so far is this. Today the Prime Minister mentioned 69 people. It is not clear to me whether those are special forces or whether that includes some of the military that are already flying our Globemaster and Hercules aircraft over there. Be that as it may, a number of special forces will go into the northern Iraq portion of the country, in the Kurdish part, and provide strategic and tactical advice to the Peshmerga forces there. They will clearly be behind the wire during this time, and after a 30-day period, Canada will review whether it will continue with that particular role, and I am not exactly sure when that clock started ticking. Essentially, that is what the government has told us.

In committee last week, I made the point of asking for assurances that there would be no combat role; in other words, those Canadians would not go to the front lines, would not accompany the Peshmerga on any offensive forays across the front lines or be involved in any defensive operations in case ISIL decided to mount a counter-offensive. I was assured that Canada would not be in any combat role.

I further asked the question whether the government would be sure to inform Parliament if it was at any point contemplating a change in the role that it has described to us thus far. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence assured us that would be the case.

Having said that, there are still many questions. I mentioned the details. We found out about the 69 today. We do not know exactly when they will arrive over there and when the 30-day clock will start.

Let me say for Canadians that it is particularly important that we get a sense of the time scale we are dealing with here. This is not a 30-day operation. If one listens to what President Obama has said, this will be a multi-year effort. Therefore, we are going way beyond the initial 30 days, and I think it is important for Canadians to realize that in order to weaken and eventually defeat ISIS or ISIL, it will take a rather long period of time; so there is a very real possibility that Canada's role could conceivably change. That is why it is important for us to get as much information as we can from the government on what possibly can happen and how this mission can evolve.

We all know that ISIS needs to be defeated on the ground. It is fine for the coalition to provide modern weapons to Iraqis and Kurdish forces. It is also very well for us to provide tactical advice, as Canada will be doing, or as other coalition members may be providing in terms of air strike support, but eventually ISIS will have to be dislodged and defeated on the ground. That is something we cannot get around.

At the moment, ISIS is firmly entrenched in a significant part of Iraq as well as in Syria, and if it is going to embed itself into some of the villages, towns and cities—Mosul, for example has two million people—it is very important for us to realize that this will take a long time and will involve some very serious operations where we want to make sure there is no collateral damage.

I was in Iraq for a few days two weeks ago and it is very clear, and all of the parties agree, that we must provide a greater contribution in terms of humanitarian effort, that we must continue our diplomatic efforts and that we must continue to deal with Iraqis refugees. However, the question is this. Militarily, other than our current role of providing airlift and the fact that we are going to provide tactical advice, what is the potential that this role could modify itself in the coming months, because it is going to take a long time? That is why it is extremely important for Canada to think this through and for Parliament to be informed in case there are any changes.

• (1820)

I apologize for not mentioning earlier that I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Quadra.

I want to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for including me and the NDP critic in this trip. We had the opportunity to see something that we do not see when we just read clippings and watch the television. We saw some of the refugees who are in the camps up in northern Iraq. United Nations officials told us that they were planning to build about 8 to 10 camps, and they had the money to do so, but they needed 25 of them. These officials have been overwhelmed by literally hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have fled the terror of ISIL and are now crowding into northern Iraq. We met Chaldean Christians who were huddling around the Chaldean church in Erbil and literally could not even go to a refugee camp. That is how drastic the situation was, because there was no refugee camp to accommodate them. It is very clear that we need to do a great deal more on the humanitarian side.

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But what about the military side? Why should Canada care? Why, as some Canadians have asked, are we getting involved over there? The reason is that this affects all of us. This is not just an Iraqi or a Syrian problem. This is a problem that concerns the collective security of the world.

According to foreign affairs, about 130 Canadians have gone over to that region and some of them have come back. They have been radicalized. They are in this country right now, possibly trying to recruit more soldiers to go over and fight for ISIL. This is something that concerns us. We cannot turn our backs on this.

The question is this. What will our military role be? Mark my words; this is going to last a long time, not just 30 days.

We need to think about this seriously. We need to follow it very clearly. We need the government to provide us with answers to the questions, when they are worked out. Some of these things will take a while to work out because military operations are complex. We cannot arrive at all of the answers right from the beginning. Some work has to be done with the Kurdish Peshmerga to define the roles. Work has to be done with the other coalition members. This will be a complex operation that will involve not only ground operations but also air operations. We expect the government to keep us informed, and most of all, we expect the government to tell us if it is contemplating any role change.

We need to do more with respect to the humanitarian issue. We all agree with that. The Minister of Foreign Affairs even agrees that we need to deliver on results there. We need to continue our diplomatic efforts, as we did when we met with the president of Iraq and the foreign affairs minister. We have to encourage that country to be inclusive of its Shiite, its Sunni and its Kurd citizens but also its minorities who are Christian and other ethnic minorities, so that they are all working with one common purpose, which is to get ride of ISIS.

Many questions will need to be answered in the coming weeks and months with respect to what roles the different members of the coalition will perform. We do not have the answers to that. We have to understand that it will take a while to get the answers.

My parting message is that Canadians must get used to the idea that this will not be over in 30 days, and Canada will not walk away from it then.

• (1825)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his reasoned, thoughtful and, indeed, experience-based intervention.

I am wondering if he would characterize from his experience what ISIL represents, what it is doing, the impact it is having on the world, which in fact represents very dark and dangerous behaviour, and perhaps clarify for us the collective Liberal position on this.

There have been some seeds of confusion sewn as of late when the member for Kingston and the Islands, in commentary, stated that the Liberals see a light and beauty in the potential of every person. Then when he was questioned about the rough exterior of somebody having a heart of gold but beheading somebody on video once a week, the member for Kingston and the Islands replied that the

person has the potential of realizing and telling everybody what he did was wrong.

I am just curious if the member opposite agrees with his colleague from Kingston and the Islands that the membership of ISIL are people who have potential and these are people who can be reasoned with, that if they would only repent, the world would forgive them and we could just ignore it, or if he indeed agrees with our side of the House on this issue that these people are dark and dangerous and absolutely need to be dealt with, and the mission that Canada is undertaking to deal with them is an important mission and one on which this entire House needs to find consensus immediately.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, Canada at this point has decided to send in an advisory group of special operations forces and stay behind the combat lines. We in the Liberal Party support that initial decision. The reason we do is that we feel that ISIS is a very dangerous threat to the world.

There is no question about it. We are already, as I mentioned in my speech, concerned about the fact that some young, misguided Canadians have gone over to that area and some have come back and they have become radicalized. We have even seen some of them on television. Apparently they have died somewhere in the combat.

This is a very serious concern. When Mr. al-Baghdadi talks about his caliphate, which could go from southern Spain to India, this is an extremely serious matter. When we see the beheadings of three people—so far two American journalists and one British aid worker—and when we see the fact of the horror of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have fled in terror from places like Mosul and others, there is no question in my mind that it is a very simple thing: ISIS is a very dangerous force, which must be defeated.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my friend from Westmount—Ville-Marie, but I do have two questions for him.

He stated on television yesterday that this would go on for years. He said tonight in his remarks that Canadians better get used to the idea that it will be happening for a long time. I gather he is contemplating Canadian involvement on a large scale for a long time, and perhaps that this is the purpose of this debate: so that Canadians get used to the idea that we will potentially escalate this into something that we could be more involved with.

We all agree, along with Security Council Resolution 2170, that this is a scourge and something that needs to be dealt with on an international level, but I wonder if the member could tell us what the international legal justification is for action at this time. I did not hear anything about that in his speech, and I know Canada usually uses international law, and hopefully will continue to, as a basis for any involvement in operations of this nature.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member is listening to what I say, but he should not jump to conclusions.

I wanted to make the point tonight that Canadians need to understand that this will not be over in 30 days, even though that was the initial deadline that the Conservative government talked about. It is important to realize that this will last a long time.

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However, we in the Liberal Party will review every single part of this evolution and particularly if there is a change in the role decided by the government, because we want to make sure the role does not change without there being a full parliamentary debate about it.

Why are we there? I think there have been violations of international law and crimes against humanity, and I do not think I have to go into much more detail about that. I think all Canadians understand that fact very clearly.

• (1830)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in this emergency debate. I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Westmount—Ville-Marie who is knowledgeable on the issue and who, on behalf of Canadians, went to see and experience the troubles in that region first-hand.

This is about Canada's military role in helping the people of Iraq defend themselves against terrorism by the Islamic State or ISIS, terrorism that is currently ravaging their country. ISIS does represent a very serious threat to security, not only in Iraq and in the Middle East but well beyond. Sad to say, there are reports of Canadian citizens who may have gone to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS and who have returned to Canada, potentially to recruit for ISIS.

Today, we are debating what we heard today, which is the government's decision to send 69 military personnel into Iraq in an advisory role. This is in addition to the airlift mission that has been charged with ferrying humanitarian as well as military supplies throughout the country.

Liberals support sending this limited number of special forces personnel to Iraq in a non-combat advisory capacity for the set period of time of 30 days, as advised by the Prime Minister, to advise the military leaders in Iraq on their conduct of operations against ISIS.

Iraq, as we well know, is very unstable, which is sad. This area was the cradle of human civilization. The government has lost control over large areas of the country, and the terrorist group, ISIS, has the goal of setting up a separate Islamic state in the region. They have no qualms about attacking and killing civilians, and persecuting religious minority groups in horrific and inhumane ways.

The newly formed government in Iraq, which includes Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish members, must coalesce to fight this vicious common enemy, but at present they need international help. As much as Canadians are angered by the events of the past few weeks, we must also take stock of these events and in a calm and rational way decide on a way forward. That is the reason the Liberals, under the leadership of the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, requested this emergency debate.

Canada has a long history of stepping up when needed. Our armed forces did so with distinction in World War I, World War II, Korea, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and countless peacekeeping and humanitarian missions around the world. Canada also made decisions not to send troops into some conflicts. Thirteen years ago, in 2003, Canada's then-Prime Minister refused to have Canadian troops take part in the invasion of Iraq. Although he faced severe criticism at the time, including from our current Prime Minister, then the opposition leader, it turned out to be the right decision. In 2008, the current

Prime Minister announced that he had changed his mind, and now considered the war on Iraq to have been a mistake.

What this tells us is that Parliament does need careful and thoughtful consideration before committing our men and women in the armed forces to go out into harm's way. The long lens of history is a good guide for us. Military action must be based on the best interests of our country. Our government's primary responsibility is to protect Canada and Canadians at home and abroad.

At times Canada has undertaken to share in the responsibility to protect people in other parts of the world who are at risk. We are known for the work we have done in the past in controlling outbreaks of violence. It is important to remember that those missions were dangerous, and members of our military were injured or killed in them. When we think of this current mission, we need to know all the facts, what the dangers are and how they will be handled.

It is in this light that we need to consider the situation into which we are sending our Canadian Forces members in this mission.

What is the mission? The Prime Minister says they are to be advisers.

What exactly does that mean? What are the risks? Where might this initial 30-day posting lead next? These are some of the unanswered questions that this debate is about.

It is essential that Canadians understand the specific nature of the mission the government is proposing. We expect to hear details from the government side. This includes outlining the specific activities our forces will be engaged in, and the expected duration of the deployment. When does it actually start? What are we committed to at this point? Canadians need to be assured that this deployment does not include what is called "close combat advising" in which our troops are in the field during combat.

• (1835)

Canadians need to know the outline of the spectrum of operations that the armed forces will be engaged in, the steps taken to ensure their safety, and how this mission will help contribute to Canada's national security interests. Most importantly, as my colleague has already outlined, Parliament must be fully consulted should the government consider extending the current mission, changing its scope, adding in new elements or new risks and responsibilities.

I encourage the Minister of National Defence to hold regular briefings with the opposition parties so that we are well informed about the mission and have the chance to contribute our ideas to ensure its success and to protect our troops. We also strongly encourage the federal government to increase the humanitarian assistance being provided to the million-plus refugees created by ISIS and to continue facilitating the resettlement of Iraqi refugees here in Canada. I look forward to hearing the defence minister's response to some of the questions and requests that I have just outlined.

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On the higher level, the expectations for the role of our military are driven by Canada's foreign policy. Currently, I'm sad to say, our foreign policy is not very coherent. It is lacking in leadership. It is reactive, when planning is actually needed. I would say that the core of the current government's foreign policy is essentially domestic political strategy expressed through megaphone diplomacy combined with the pursuit of trade objectives. That is the Conservative foreign policy. This leads to a series of reactive actions and statements, reacting to global events or crises without a principled framework to guide decisions and actions. This is not acceptable. This absence of consistency in the government's vision of Canada's identity and role in the world is undermining our credibility among our international partners and doing a great deal of damage to Canada's hard-earned positive image on the world stage.

Not only is a coherent foreign policy missing, so too is a coherent defence strategy. In 2008, the current Conservative government trumpeted its commitment to stable and increasing funding for the Canadian Armed Forces for 20 years into the future, but within just two years, the Conservatives began a series of hidden freezes, cuts and clawbacks. Today, the army, navy and air force are scrambling to train, equip and support their members in the face of significant budget reductions, with cuts to operations and maintenance functions resulting in critical challenges to the forces' readiness.

Today, the National Defence budget has not only sunk to below the level it was seven years ago, despite the promises of a stable increase in funding, it is the lowest spending as a percentage of GDP for Canada since the World Bank began tracking that measure in the 1980s. It is now at 1% of GDP and still falling, compared with a budget of 1.3% of GDP under a prior Liberal government.

It is our duty as parliamentarians to ask the hard questions when we are contemplating putting our military members in harm's way. As Liberals, we stand behind the current deployment of 69 military advisers to help the Iraqi people stop ISIS. We are proud of Canada's legacy of global citizenship, contributed by our armed forces many times over the years. We are immensely proud of the quality of persons and unflinching dedication of the men and women in uniform of the Canadian Armed Forces. It is our duty as parliamentarians in every way we can to contribute to supporting their safety and success.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that we have to have that kind of political partisanship go on in the House tonight when we are trying to move forward with helping the people of Iraq.

I wonder if the member can comment on why it is that she voted against every increase that we put in place for our military. It was her government that sent our men and women in uniform into the Afghanistan conflict in jungle uniform, not desert uniform, because the Liberals had cut the budget of the military so drastically that there was no money for them to have the proper equipment.

We want to help the people of Iraq. We are there with advisers on the ground. We want to see this conflict come to an end. We want to know that they have the very best advice possible.

I wonder if the member could comment, first of all, on why she voted against our budget increases for the military in the first place.

Will the Liberals continue to support us in having these advisers in Iraq to give the very best contribution that Canada can give at this point to help Iraq develop its own way forward?

• (1840)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie was very clear, as was I. The Liberals support this deployment in Iraq because of the reasons that have been mentioned in our speeches, because of the humanitarian challenges, and because of the unprecedented viciousness of ISIS.

Regarding the past number of years when I have expressed my concern about the withdrawal of funding from the Canadian Armed Forces, I see us, unfortunately, as being in a decade of deception with the Conservative government claiming to support the armed forces and in the meantime having hidden budget cuts and clawbacks that have been very costly. Today in the House there was a discussion about some of the human costs, in terms of suicides, through lack of support by the government.

I would advise the member opposite to consider what she and her colleagues can do to convince the Prime Minister and the minister to fully support the men and women in uniform so these tragedies stop occurring.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question arising from the member's comments.

She mentioned Canada not joining the war in Iraq, but that was a sustained effort by Canadians and, I will be very frank, my party as opposition to that, which eventually led to the Prime Minister of the day, Mr. Chrétien, saying no to Iraq. Here we are having a debate with no vote.

By the way, here is why New Democrats are so concerned about mission creep. After that decision was made, we now know that Mr. Chrétien said yes to Kandahar and we ended up in Afghanistan without any preparation. New Democrats are extremely concerned.

Is she not concerned that we do not repeat that failure, where we did not consult, did not have a debate, and did not have a vote in the House, and we ended up in Kandahar after we said no to Iraq and after there was public pressure to say no to Iraq?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, that is the very reason that my colleague from Westmount—Ville-Marie and I have both been very clear about the engagement of parliamentarians with respect to the details of the deployment announced so far. Real clarity as to what the parameters are is very important. Even more important, should there be any changes, Parliament should be engaged, participate, and be briefed fully on that.

We are very clear that scope creep is a dangerous thing. The deployment as it is today is not a combat role. We are supporting what is in front of us while asking for more clarity and for the government to do a full briefing and inclusion, not only on this deployment but on any planned changes.

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Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here this evening for this debate and to speak on behalf of a government that is committed in full across these benches and the country to doing what is necessary to support the people of Iraq. It is a government that is committed to doing what is necessary to stop, contain and, if possible, eliminate this scourge of terrorism from a proud region and a world that is many decades into its history of considering terrorism in various forms of Islamic extremism a top threat to peace and stability not just in Iraq but in many countries, a world that deserves better. It is a world that deserves to say that for once we are working together, not just Canada with its allies but with partners across the Middle East and around the world, to ensure that terrorism will never again usurp state authority, take over, replace the authority of a state. It did that in Afghanistan in the 1990s and it has been threatening to do it in Iraq in recent days and weeks.

It was with pleasure that I listened to the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie who endorsed the government's actions and difficult decision to support the military strategy being pursued under the leadership of the United States, but with the participation of dozens of countries. It was with some consternation that we were subjected to the partisan tirade from the member of Parliament for Vancouver Quadra. She did not say much about Iraq, but made a variety of unsubstantiated allegations and comparisons that I will not dwell on because these issues are too important.

For the member for St. John's East, the legal authority they are under is very clear. We are there at the invitation of the Iraqi government. We are there at the invitation of the Kurdish regional government. We are there with the strong support of the Iraqi people, who fear this menace as much as we do. This time in Iraq, it is a situation that very much mirrors the invitation and welcome that Canadian Forces received in Afghanistan in 2001, 2002 and then again on a larger scale in 2003 when faced with similar circumstances.

Let us look briefly at the roots of this terrorism that is causing us disquiet when we watch our television screens, which is causing deep concern to the Iraqi people and which is costing lives. In Syria, it has cost almost 200,000 lives over the past three years. In Iraq, the numbers are growing to those kinds of proportions because of the presence of this absolutely perfidious terrorist entity.

In the 1980s, al Qaeda, founded in Pakistan and operating in Afghanistan, brought part of this ideology to the fore. Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, neither of them are with us today, were inspired by the teachings of Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s, someone who championed the idea that states were not necessary for Islam, in his perverted understanding of it, to be practised and, when necessary, enforced in Pakistan, Afghanistan and countries of the Arab world.

Before it is too late, Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the outstanding member of Parliament for Calgary East, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who will have much more substantive comments to add.

We know that al Qaeda almost consumed the destiny of an entire nation, thanks to the Taliban, its affiliate, ally and franchise, that ran Afghanistan for five years. This ideology of al Qaeda also flourished

in the Chechen war and in other smaller conflicts in the Middle East over the past 20 years.

• (1845)

Then in Iraq in 2003, following a U.S. invasion, following the liquidation of the Baathist state, following the dismissal of Iraq's army and police, we in Afghanistan saw a huge phenomenon of hardened terrorist fighters, some Afghani, some Pakistani, many from dozens of other countries around the world, literally going to Iraq to fight the United States, Shiites and moderates of all kinds. They have been there ever since, building on that legacy, to the point where in Syria, after 2011, after the U.S. had succeeded in restoring state authority through most of Iraq found a new state teetering on the brink of collapse, established new spaces in which to train, build and base themselves to continue the fight against President Assad and to then resume it across the border in Iraq.

We find ourselves today with major two countries, Syria and Iraq, countries facing a common threat from a terrorist organization that is now fighting on a scale that we have not seen before. I do not think there was ever a time in Afghanistan when 20,000 to 25,000 foreign fighters with this kind of training and this kind of fire power were arrayed against the Afghan state. They certainly were not ever a threat to two states at once.

We are in a very worrying predicament. We are in a situation that poses a major threat to international peace and security. Let us remember the complicity of certain other states in allowing things to go this far. There was a chance last year, as the parliamentary secretary and the Minister of Foreign Affairs well know, to do more in Syria to counter these menaces.

Vladimir Putin decided that this was not a good idea and that it was better to ensure that the suffering of the Syrian people, and later the Iraqi people, would mount to new heights, and to prevent the international community from coming together to take decisive action to prevent this terrorist menace from growing to the scale that we now see.

This is not just an organization that represents a danger to us all. It is an ideology. They do not want to just replace the Syrian and Iraqi states; they want to replace states all the way from South Asia to Al-Andalus on the Iberian Peninsula. This is their dream, this is their ideology and this is our nightmare. It is combined with terrorist capacity, not just small arms and fast trucks, but a willingness to indoctrinate young people to literally give up their own lives to take lives from innocent civilians, suicide bombers.

There is the use of weapons of mass destruction, if they can get their hands on them. We have seen that. We have seen efforts by al Qaeda, by groups inspired by it, to try to get hold of chemical weapons and dirty bombs. Thank goodness they have not done so to date.

We also see this ideology of takfirism, something that is absolutely foreign and antithetical to the true values of Islam, which is the doctrine embraced by the so-called Islamic state in Iraq, that it is the right of Muslims, in their dark vision, to take the lives of either Muslims who do not share that vision or of non-Muslims. It is an arbitrary decision.

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We have seen it practised time and again, recently, not just in executions but in the murders of Yazidis and religious minorities, and the massacres of populations across Iraq.

That is why we are proud to be taking action. We are proud to have deployed the Canadian Forces to advise and assist. We are proud to be delivering relief supplies from a stockpile Canada had the foresight to create in the UAE. We are proud to be a leading contributor already to humanitarian assistance, to have been there on the ground, present in Kurdistan, with our Minister of Foreign Affairs and members of the opposition to see the gravity of the situation first hand, and to provide security programs, as well as to assist in the delivery of military equipment from Albania and other countries.

• (1850)

Our goal is to prevent and deter terrorism worldwide. Our goal is to prevent Canadians from being involved more than they already are. The Combating Terrorism Act has done that. The new citizenship act has done that.

Our action in the region will do more than any of our previous efforts to finally start to build the coalition, the capacity and the international will to ensure that this terrorist threat does not continue to grow and is ultimately brought to yield.

• (1855)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the minister has previous experience there, but listening to his speech, one thing we get from it is the enormous complexity of what is going on in the Middle East, with all of the different players and different effects that have been created by interventions of one sort or another by the United States and others. He talked about ideology and one brand of Islam versus another.

Is he serious that Canada can actually play a significant role in that, or is there is a way we can concentrate our efforts on, as he mentioned at the end of his speech, preventing and doing whatever we can to ensure that Canadians do not participate in this, but assisting in the humanitarian struggle? We have 800,000 to over one million displaced persons in northern Iraq who need help very badly.

I am not sure he has convinced me that Canada has a role to play militarily there that would be of any use.

Hon. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, we have many roles to play. One of them is setting a good example.

The Muslim community of Canada has spoken against the scourge of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. They are co-operating with Canadian authorities to try to prevent young people from choosing this dangerous course.

We as a government are at the forefront of efforts to criminalize any activity that would strengthen these groups. It is now a crime to leave Canada to join these groups and commit acts of terrorism of this kind, and we are proud of that fact.

In addition, we have already resettled over 18,500 Iraqis since 2009, which is the largest number of any immigration country to my knowledge. Most of these people are religious and ethnic minorities who had been experiencing this deadly persecution.

We also set a great example in Afghanistan by combining tough military effort with state building and development, which has been successful. The Islamic state is not a threat to Afghanistan at the moment and the Taliban is not an existential threat to Afghanistan at the moment, largely thanks to Canadian effort.

We can and must do more to prevent an entire state from being consumed in the hateful fire of this terrorist entity and becoming a new safe haven for terrorism to be projected elsewhere in the world. And, yes, that does involve military effort.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have outlined our position, and certainly the need for action against ISIS, but there is certainly another element, and the minister in a way alluded to it.

The fact is that those Canadians who become radicalized, leave and enter the fight in foreign land and then come back to Canada carrying a passport endangers Canada and the lives of Canadians.

It is not enough to say that the government is going to exercise criminal charges against those individuals. We do know, and I think it was reported just recently, that there was somewhere around 30 people who had come back to Canada. Are they being monitored? We do not know that.

We have a motion before the public safety committee asking that a committee or subcommittee look into issue. Why is it happening? What other measures can be taken?

Is the government willing to support us in that motion to ensure that the fight that is taking place abroad and those Canadians who are radicalized coming home that we ensure our own homeland and Canadians are protected as well? Would the minister be willing to support that initiative?

Hon. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, anyone who has left this country to commit an act of terrorism will be investigated and, if the evidence is sufficient, prosecuted. We hope that all members opposite will join us in making sure that the effort is thorough and complete, and that it not only leads to justice being done in those cases but also prevents and deters others from joining in.

However, I would like to ask the former solicitor general opposite why it is at that point that he stops his concern about terrorism and his action to deter it. We are prepared, as Canadians have always been, to draw a line where the privilege of citizenship ends. Unlike the Liberal Party and the NDP, we will revoke citizenship of dual nationals who are found guilty of acts of terrorism and who are so convicted.

Let us not be under any illusions here. This terrorism is not a made-in-Canada phenomenon. This Islamic state is not a made-in-Iraq phenomenon. This is not solely a series of violent non-governmental organizations; there has been state sponsorship of these groups in the Arab world from South Asia, and that issue too needs to be addressed if we are going to finally come to grips with this terrible menace to international peace and security.

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● (1900)

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and join my colleague, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to talk about the situation in the Middle East.

Let me remind the opposition and the people who are watching today that my esteemed colleague was our ambassador in Afghanistan. He served in Afghanistan exactly at the time when Afghanistan was facing a serious crisis of terrorism. He served with distinction there, so he is speaking with extreme authority on what is happening in the region.

Let me say this. The crisis that gathers us today hit us all in the summer, with shocking images of ISIL executions and Iraqi civilians displaced by the conflict. In order to understand how we got to that point, there are elements of Iraq's history and social fabric that must be laid out.

Iraq is a diverse country and home to several religious and ethnic minorities, some of which are now sadly famous for being targeted by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. However, Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and ethnic Kurds are the three main groups that compose its population. In the last three decades, each of these groups has suffered traumatic experiences at the hands of brutal terrorist groups, militias, and governments.

Until 2003, Iraq was governed by the Sunni-backed government of Saddam Hussein, whose gross human rights violations against his own people are well known and well documented. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, in particular Shias and Kurds, perished under his reign. Following the transitional period that followed Saddam's fall, a Shia-led government was elected in Iraq with promises of an inclusive government.

However, these promises were not fulfilled. Between 2003 and 2013, the Sunni population grew increasingly marginalized. De-Baathification laws, which were aimed at removing the influence of Saddam Hussein's party in the new Iraqi political system, barred Sunnis from employment in the public sector and made them second-class citizens. Sunnis became easy targets for arbitrary arrests under Iraq's anti-terror law, and in the spring of 2013 Iraqi forces violently cracked down on Sunni protesters, killing approximately 50 people.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish people in the north were developing their institutions and turning the region into a safe investment hub. Thanks to the safe haven and no-fly zone imposed by the U.S. and allies over northern Iraq in 1991, the Kurdistan Regional Government was relatively isolated from the violence that affected the rest of the country. The 2005 Iraqi constitution also granted the Kurds considerable autonomy and close to one-fifth of the federal budget. However, these provisions were not fully implemented in Baghdad, which fuelled discontent and aspirations for greater autonomy.

This is the situation that was in place when the recent crisis started: a centralized and authoritarian government led by the Shia majority, a disgruntled Sunni minority, and Kurdish people in the north with growing aspirations for economic and political autonomy.

ISIL's resurgence in Iraq started gradually, preying on the vulnerabilities that I described and in particular the marginalization of Sunnis. Since 2010, the terrorist group had focused most of its activities in Syria, after being defeated by Iraqi and U.S. forces backed by Sunni militias. Throughout 2013, ISIL increased the tempo of attacks and bombings in Iraq. That year alone, approximately 10,000 Iraqis died as a result of the violence. In January, ISIL took control over parts of Iraq's western province of Anbar, including the towns of Ramadi and Fallujah, less than 100 kilometres from Baghdad. At this stage, the Minister of Foreign Affairs publicly expressed Canada's concern and called upon the Iraqi government to work across religious and ethnic lines to resolve the crisis.

The population of Anbar is mostly Sunni. Some of them were so disenchanted with the Maliki government that they viewed ISIL as a viable alternative, or at least were willing to tolerate ISIL's presence. Many have changed their minds since then. Although the Maliki government was unpopular among Sunnis, the vast majority of people in Anbar did not welcome ISIL's occupation. As anyone would do in the face of brutal oppression, they tried to flee ISIL's violence, which resulted in the first wave of internal displacement. In total, almost half a million people from Anbar were forced to leave their homes between January and May of this year.

Despite these challenging circumstances, Iraq was able to organize parliamentary elections in late April. Former prime minister al-Maliki's Dawa party won, but fell short of a majority. Maliki's popularity was low, and Sunnis and Kurds were reluctant to join his coalition.

● (1905)

In June, ISIL made a rapid advance toward the north, reportedly with support from Sunni tribes. It captured Mosul, Tikrit, several other cities and villages, and key infrastructure. Mosul is Iraq's second city, and its control was a significant victor for ISIL, not only in terms of territory, but also because of the oil and cash seized by ISIL.

Canadians were also shocked to see reports about some of their own fighting with ISIL in Iraq.

Throughout the summer, ISIL continued to move towards the north, moving toward Kurdish-controlled territory. ISIL's advance was accompanied by reports of horrible human rights abuses. ISIL itself texted and tweeted about these disgusting acts, posting pictures and videos online. Near Tikrit, several hundred members of the Iraqi army were executed and buried. Near Mosul, ISIL executed approximately 500 prisoners, and as we know, two U.S. journalists, who have since been joined by a British aid worker, were savagely beheaded in retaliation for U.S. air strikes

In July, the Prime Minister strongly condemned religious persecution by ISIL in Iraq.

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Indeed, Yazidis and Christians were being kidnapped, raped, and killed. Some were able to flee to safety, but in August several thousand Yazidis got trapped on Mount Sinjar. They were families with nothing left but the clothes on their backs. At that stage the U.S. decided to intervene with humanitarian airdrops and air strikes.

Throughout June and July, the humanitarian crisis deepened. During those two months, nearly half a million Iraqis were displaced, most of whom sought refuge in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Their testimonials, some of which were shared with the Minister of Foreign Affairs while in Iraq two weeks ago, are chilling. It will take time for Iraq and the international community to get a full picture of the numerous abuses committed by ISIL during the summer months.

During this dark period, the newly elected Iraqi parliament elected a speaker, Salim al-Jabouri, and a president, Fouad Massoum, who in turn nominated a prime minister designate, Haider al-Abadi. At every step Canada encouraged the Iraqi leadership to continue its progress toward the formation of a new, inclusive government. We did so because we strongly believe there can be no enduring peace in Iraq without an inclusive government.

Like most terrorist groups, ISIL preys on divisions. The marginalization of the Sunni population under Iraq's last government allowed for ISIL's recent comeback in Iraq, so it is important for the new government not to repeat the same mistakes.

Luckily, a new, legitimate, and inclusive government led by Haider al-Abadi was sworn in on September 8. Along with our allies, we are determined to give that government the tools it needs to get the job done.

Canada is already one of the main contributors of humanitarian assistance. We will continue to support Iraqi security forces, including Kurdish Peshmerga, which are fighting ISIL. Our assistance includes air support and military advice. A broad international coalition is forming against ISIL, and a growing number of countries are doing their share alongside Canada.

Last year, we passed the Combatting Terrorism Act, which creates an offence of leaving or attempting to leave Canada to commit certain terrorism offences. These offences can carry a prison term of up to 14 years. While in Iraq, the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced \$5 million in programming to stem the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. We are working with like-minded partners to address this problem, and these efforts will continue.

Canada is also committed to countering terrorist financing. ISIL, also known as al Qaeda in Iraq, is a listed terrorist entity in Canada. Under Canadian laws, our financial institutions have an obligation to freeze ISIL's assets and to disclose details of assets to law enforcement.

Finally, we will continue to push for an effective, inclusive, and representative federal government in Baghdad through our programming and diplomatic actions. By inclusive, I am referring not only to the composition of the government but also to the government's program and actions.

● (1910)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to have a little more clarification, if I could.

On September 5, the Prime Minister phrased the involvement of Canadian Forces not in terms only of advising but also in advising and assisting. Very recently, the Prime Minister of Australia has added a qualification by saying that the 600 troops that he has sent are not there for “independent combat operations”.

We also know that initially the Prime Minister responded to requests from President Obama and not from the government of Iraq, initially, to send the troops, and we also know that in Afghanistan, special forces' primary role was to act in assistance with special forces of the U.S.

Given all these facts, what assurance do we have that Canadian troops now, and even in renewed terms, will not be involved with Iraqi troops or American troops on the ground, especially given that they are special forces used to working with American troops?

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence were at the foreign affairs committee with the Chief of the Defence Staff. Both of them made it very clear to the committee that the Canadian Forces were there in an advisory capacity, not on a combat mission. It was clear, as both sat in the committee.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a specific question for my hon. colleague. The government has talked about reviewing after 30 days the role that has initially been described. My question is when that 30-day clock begins. My assumption is that it will begin when Canada reports that the special ops forces have arrived in northern Iraq and that they are now working with the Kurdish. The government will give us some kind of signal that the clock now begins. I was wondering if my hon. colleague could confirm that.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of logistics as our troops go there in an advisory capacity to the government of Iraq as well as to the northern Kurdish government. Let me just answer on a different matter. We will let him know when the 30 days expire, and should anything change, we will come back to the House.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all shocked by what is going on in Iraq. I had the opportunity to be on site in Baghdad in September 2011 as one of the first Canadian representatives in many years.

Meanwhile, while we are speaking about armed intervention, there is an army of civilians in Canada who also want to do something. I know certainly in the Vancouver area, people like Ernest Lang, Helen Miller and Farid Rohani are trying to bring together Canadians to rally and encourage our government to do something. They are talking about how to cut off financial resources to ISIL. They are talking about expanding humanitarian aid.

What does he recommend Canadian citizens do to send a message that we will end this perfidious nightmare in Iraq?

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Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what my hon. colleague has said, that there are Canadians who are watching and seeing what is happening: the indiscriminate killing, the rape of women, and the humanitarian crisis taking place. As my colleague, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has said, we have taken the largest number of refugees from Iraq of any country that we know of.

I do understand that, but at the current time, the bigger threat is that this group does not conform to any laws. It does not conform to any human rights, does not respect any human rights or anything. That is the biggest threat that needs to be confronted. To confront that, it is necessary that we take this collective action, but the government is also committed to helping with humanitarian assistance for the displaced people of Iraq.

• (1915)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2004, the then-opposition leader, today the Prime Minister, joined with Jack Layton in calling for a change to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

They agreed that all MPs should be allowed to vote on any Canadian participation in armed conflicts.

In 2006, the Conservative Party platform pledged to:

Make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over the conduct of Canadian foreign policy and the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations.

Members might notice that it does not say “to some foreign operations”. There are no conditions. There are no exceptions. It does not say “to combat missions”, ill-defined or not defined.

In 2007, the Conservative Speech from the Throne, the most formal form of address in our Parliament reiterated that the government has made clear to Canadians and our allies that:

...any future military deployments must also be supported by a majority of parliamentarians.

We know how parliamentarians express their voice. It is through a vote in this House.

In 2009, the Prime Minister declared unequivocally that his government would henceforth:

...require that military deployments...be supported by the Parliament of Canada.

I listened with great interest as the member of Parliament for Westmount—Ville-Marie and after him the Liberal member for Vancouver Quadra expressed their unconditional support for what the government was doing. The only problem is that we do not know what those troops are being asked to do on the ground.

Referencing back to last week's hearings in committee of course provides no information whatsoever. I was gobsmacked to hear the minister evoke weapons of mass destruction. I had a feeling that I had got into a time machine as the Conservatives were groping for a way to explain this thing.

We have just heard the parliamentary secretary say, with incredible arrogance, that they will let us know when the 30 days are up. In other words, their timing is up to them, the contents of the mission will never be discussed in this House, and those who have

been elected to represent Canadians will not be allowed to vote. The NDP does not accept this.

[*Translation*]

I am extremely disappointed that neither the Prime Minister nor the leader of the Liberal Party is here with us this evening. This is a state matter. It is a question of defining what type of society we want to live in. To us, their absence speaks volumes. This is an emergency debate, a rare event in our parliamentary lives. They should have been here. They should have been speaking.

[*English*]

It is important to understand the threat, and let us look at that objectively. Members of the House fully understand the serious humanitarian and security risk posed by the organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL.

The violence perpetrated by ISIL is reprehensible. It includes mass killings, sexual violence against women, threatening religious and ethnic minorities with genocide, forcibly displacing civilians, and destroying holy sites. More than 1.5 million people have already been affected by the humanitarian situation in Iraq, which goes back far beyond the current one. Some 1.2 million people have been displaced, and conditions, of course, are worsening every day.

[*Translation*]

The United Nations declared what they call the highest level of emergency. The humanitarian crisis and the security threats could spill over the borders of Iraq and Syria. Responding to ISIL's threats requires a thorough and serious assessment of the facts on the ground and a clear understanding of the role Canada intends to play. From the government we get nothing, just empty meaningless words.

That is where the government has failed to answer fundamental questions from Canadians and representatives of the House. We cannot defeat ISIL by being vague and failing to show transparency.

• (1920)

[*English*]

We are not even told how many troops are being deployed, after being told today that yesterday it was several dozen and today it was 69. I was listening to the Minister of Foreign Affairs figure skating on one of the panel shows this afternoon, talking about how it was about logistics and planes and how long it takes them to get out.

We do not know. The government is not being transparent with Canadians.

[*Translation*]

More importantly, no one has told us yet in clear terms what the troops are going to do in this conflict. The only answer we get is that our troops will advise the Kurdish forces. Maybe so, but the Minister of National Defence told Parliament and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development that our troops will not be in a combat role and that this was not a combat mission. He even reiterated that our combat troops will not put boots on Iraqi soil. It had to be done.

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[English]

Boots will not be on the ground. They are either wearing sandals or they are levitating. Which one is it?

[Translation]

He cannot or does not want to answer questions regarding the type of advice that a dozen special operations forces units will be giving to Kurdish forces. Given the Peshmerga's history, knowledge of the region and expertise, what advice would they need from Canada?

If these special forces are helping to line up targets but letting someone else fire the shots, does that constitute advice? Is it not merely a matter of semantics? The member for Toronto—Danforth mentioned this earlier when he quoted the Australian prime minister. The Australian prime minister added a qualifier because he would not get directly involved in a cause all on his own. Is that the type of game we are playing?

I could not believe what the member for Vancouver Quadra said earlier. She rose and said:

[English]

We should be “briefed fully”.

[Translation]

That is good enough for the Liberals when it comes to international affairs.

• (1925)

[English]

We should be briefed fully.

[Translation]

As parliamentarians, we do not just have the right to be informed. We should also be consulted and we have the right to vote.

[English]

The government says it will reassess our contribution in 30 days. We are not told what criteria they have used for the reassessment, and after all, this initial contribution was made at the request of Americans based on their assessment. It is safe to assume that this conflict will not end in 30 days, obviously. The U.S. administration has talked about a multi-year strategy, as do the Conservatives. It is no surprise that so many Canadians are deeply concerned about mission creep. This is a slippery slope.

These are serious strategic questions that need to be answered. The lack of focus is not benign, especially when we enter the theatre of war in a region marred by decades of conflict. If the government is incapable of answering basic strategic questions about its military commitment to Iraq, then how are Canadians to know what it is doing, and how are they to believe the information they are being given? It is quite clear from what we have heard tonight that it does not know what it is doing.

Still, it is committing us to a conflict that will expand. That is why it is essential for the government to present a clear motion in the House that outlines the details of Canada's commitment to Iraq. I said that the way it was meant. It is the government's responsibility, because I also heard the Minister of Foreign Affairs tonight say that

it was the opposition's responsibility to bring it to a vote. We can, with an opposition day, but tonight we were supposed to get clear information and answers to our questions, and we have gotten nothing. Canadians do not know any more about this mission happening.

After a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Canadians expect their leaders to approach potential military commitments with prudence and transparency. That is why Canadians will be deeply disappointed that the Prime Minister and the Liberal leader did not participate in tonight's emergency debate.

We can all remember back in 2003 that the current Prime Minister, who at the time served as opposition leader, was so keen to join the U.S. military involvement in Iraq. He even penned an op-ed in an American paper bemoaning Canadian opposition to the war. We all remember that. Maybe the minister was hoping he would get special bonus points for mentioning weapons of mass destruction tonight. Frankly, I think he has only embarrassed himself and his government. It is of particular concern that the government appears incapable of conveying a coherent understanding of the mission's objectives, strategy, costs, and timelines.

[Translation]

The same vagueness under the Liberals led to almost a decade of mission creep in Afghanistan. This House must remember that Canada's involvement in Afghanistan was also only supposed to be a short-term deployment of a small group of special operations forces. That should tell us something.

That mission also began under a veil of secrecy and without a debate in the House of Commons. That is why the current Prime Minister, who was an opposition member at the time, said that he was outraged that Parliament had not been consulted. I imagine that this is a case of “that was then, this is now”.

A decade later, a different government risks repeating those same mistakes by getting Canada involved in a military mission in Iraq, this time without having clearly defined the mandate of the members of the Canadian Forces or obtaining Parliament's approval.

[English]

The same vagueness under the Liberals led almost to a decade of mission creep in Afghanistan. This House has to recall that Canada's involvement in Afghanistan also began with what was supposed to be a short-term deployment of a small group of special operations forces. That mission also began under a veil of secrecy and without a debate and vote in the House of Commons.

A decade later, a different government risks repeating those same mistakes. There is no excuse for it, because the Conservatives were the ones who stood up and said we have to change the rules, Parliament has to be consulted, Parliament has to be informed and Parliament has a right to vote on these issues.

Now there are clear humanitarian needs. When it comes to the humanitarian needs on the ground and Canada's expertise in addressing these needs, there is no vagueness.

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Our foreign affairs critic was in Iraq just two weeks ago. Officials in Baghdad and in Erbil asked Canadian parliamentarians for a contribution to their humanitarian needs. Interestingly enough, there was no request for Canadian military involvement in the conflict.

We have called on the government to contribute to the United Nations appeal for aid to meet the needs of the internally displaced in Iraq. Winter is coming and we have models from other countries, like Norway, which has sent in massive supplies to help.

[*Translation*]

We have called on the government to assist in addressing sexual violence. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence has reported numerous acts of violence, including acts of sexual violence against women, girls and boys, who are members of Iraqi minorities. Canada could allocate funds to meet the special needs of the victims of this sexual violence.

We have urged the government to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected and to ensure that those responsible for these war crimes are put on trial. Despite the government's promises, we are still waiting for it to do something. We must keep paying close attention to the Syrian refugee crisis, which has already had a major impact on Jordan and Turkey, countries that are currently doing their part. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Canada under this Conservative government that is doing nothing.

[*English*]

There are too many unanswered questions about the Conservative government's approach to Iraq. We need immediate action on the humanitarian front. We need prudence and transparency on the military front. Tonight's debate cannot meet these objectives, since the government still refuses to present a motion that clearly outlines the objectives, parameters and timelines of this mission.

The Prime Minister must keep his promise to Canadians and put this military deployment to a democratic vote of Canada's Parliament.

[*Translation*]

There are too many unanswered questions about the Conservative government's approach to the deployment of the Canadian troops in Iraq. The Prime Minister must keep his promises to Canadians and put this issue to a vote in the House. Without a real debate, without any real information, no responsible person can support this mission in Iraq.

• (1930)

[*English*]

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition just laughed about the issue of weapons of mass destruction with his caucus members just over one year after chemical weapons were used against the population of Syria.

If he does not realize that these terrorist groups did their utmost to try to acquire that capacity, that they operate in both Syria and Iraq, that the Taliban and al Qaeda went to great lengths to try to acquire nuclear materials, he is showing deep ignorance. I think he has shown us today the least serious speech by a leader of the opposition

in this place on an important matter of international peace and security in the history of this place.

I have a question for the Leader of the Opposition. Is he listening?

A CC-130 Hercules, a CC-177 Globemaster supported by 75 Canadian Armed Forces personnel in the Mediterranean, 69 special operations members of the Canadian Forces advising the government of Iraq on how to enable security forces in the northern part of the country to be more effective against the threat they face, providing strategic and tactical advice in an advisory and assistance role, not in a combat role.

Does he understand that? Does he know what our troops are doing, after so many people have told him in plain English exactly what this mission amounts to? How would he vote if it were brought to a vote in this place?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, when I hear the foolishness the minister was just spouting, I am somewhat concerned about how seriously he is taking this matter, given that he holds a very important position.

It is astounding that he confused the Syrian government, which used chemical weapons, with the terrorists. The whole weapons of mass destruction hoax, which was the reason behind the botched invasion in 2003, is being repeated by a cabinet minister in 2014.

What a disgrace.

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition the following question.

If at the end of this evening there were a vote, and if all of his questions were answered, if all of his questions were answered to his satisfaction, and if he understood this to be a non-combat role, behind the wire, to be reviewed after 30 days; if that were the situation and all his questions were answered, would he tell us how he would vote?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, beyond the wire, in an asymmetrical war, brilliant.

These are the members of the team, the Liberal team, who have shown us what they think about international affairs. Their leader stood up and applauded the government's European trade deal, a deal the Liberals had yet to read.

The Liberals are standing up tonight and applauding the government's military intervention in Iraq, despite the fact that this House is not being allowed to vote on it, and in his intervention the member of Parliament for Westmount—Ville-Marie said that if the role does change, the government is going to have to let us know and it is going to have to inform us.

We do not want to be informed. We have a right to vote. We were elected to do a job. It is too bad that he does not do his.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do have a question for the Leader of the Opposition in light of the comments heard here tonight from the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie that Canadians should be prepared for a long battle.

Standing Order 52

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration talked about the length of time it would take to do the work.

We have a 30-day mission with a vague mandate.

I wonder, given the fact that mission creep has been dismissed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, what the Leader of the Opposition thinks of reports out of the U.S. that the Joint Chiefs of Staff's General Martin Dempsey is already talking about considering having the use of the military advisers in attacks against ISIS.

That is before Canadians are even there. The Americans are talking about advancing the advisers. These are the advisers and assistants that we are going to be sending. The Americans are looking at possibly using them for attacks on ISIS.

Is the Leader of the Opposition concerned? Does he wonder why Canadians are concerned about the potential of being dragged into a war in Iraq?

• (1935)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from St. John's East raises the most important question of all: what is the nature of this mission?

What words are being played with as the government describes an advisory role? These are Canada's top, elite special forces. If they are targeting, and someone else is doing the shooting, is that just advising?

We do not have any details about that. What we had tonight was a diatribe, un ramassis of George W. Bush-era arguments.

This is what we are listening to here tonight. There is nothing that has been put on the table tonight that would allow any reasonable Canadian to vote in favour of the mission being proposed by the Conservatives, because we know, as my colleague correctly points out, that the Americans are already talking about several years. We have been down that path before.

We were down that path when the Liberals, after deciding correctly not to go into Iraq, decided that we should go into Kandahar, unprepared for the situation we were being put into. That is mission creep.

That is the slippery slope that the government is putting us on. That is why we are insisting, not to be informed but to be consulted and to have a right to vote based on full information.

As things now stand, we do not have enough information to do that. That is why the only responsible thing is to say no to the Conservatives.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say this for the Leader of the Opposition. When this House was discussing the issue of Afghanistan and the NDP was sitting over there, it was the same argument that they were trying to make: we do not want to go, we do not want to go. We do not want to be looking for excuses to do all that. The same speech he is making here today was made by Jack Layton and his people sitting over there. Today—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary will come to order.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, if there were still people listening tonight who thought that perhaps the government was serious, I think that all doubt has been removed. What we are looking at now is the same thing we are going to be looking at from the government benches: posturing, positioning, using the lives of our brave women and men in uniform, sending them into an ill-defined mission, asking Canadians to buy a pig in a poke.

Canadians deserve to know what this mission is about and what the real dangers are. We are not going to be like the Liberals. We are not going to drag us down the slippery slope that brought us into Kandahar. We are not going to accept being told by the Conservatives, especially when it is the same Conservatives who brought motion after motion to say that no Canadian military mission should ever take place without a vote in this House. That is what they said they wanted. That is what we demand: there should be a vote in the House of Commons on this mission.

Hon. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that military missions happen all the time without votes in this House. We deploy people to join NATO missions, to join training missions, to join reassurance missions throughout the NATO area of operations without votes in this House. For the reassurance mission to stand up to Vladimir Putin's aggression, we did not hear the Leader of the Opposition complaining that we deployed Canadian Forces there.

Let us ask the leader again. Is it that he does not believe, that he does not understand or that he still does not know that this a combat mission, or is he still gobsmacked to learn that Osama bin Laden is actually dead?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, this is coming from the same person who, a little bit earlier this evening, said that he took it really seriously when people in one of those groups said they were going to take over everything from Al-Andalus, which is in Spain, to India. That is how serious he thinks this is.

This is what we are dealing with. We are dealing with a government that does not even recognize that it is doing the exact same thing, and it is true that when we do not learn the lessons of history, we are condemned to repeat them. The lessons in Afghanistan were that we were drawn into a conflict that cost well over 100 Canadians, cost tens of billions of dollars, for a situation that is right now barely more stable than it was then. This is because the Conservatives and the Liberals simply followed all the instructions from other powers.

This is not a NATO mission. There is no NATO mandate here. It has nothing to do with NATO. So any reference by this minister to NATO in Iraq shows the paucity of his empty rhetoric and his incapacity to present a case that will convince Canadians.

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• (1940)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join this debate tonight on the current crisis that is unfolding in Iraq. Before I begin, I would like to mention that I will be splitting my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this issue to the House, as I believe it is one that merits the full benefit of parliamentary discussion—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, may I continue?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. members may wish to take their seats and come to order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that all colleagues across the House can agree that the threat posed by terrorist regimes taking greater control of Iraq is of great concern. It is of great concern to the well-being of the Iraqi people. It is a concern to the peace and stability in the Middle East. It is a concern to global security.

Canada is not willing to accept a scenario in which the Islamic State of Iraq is allowed to consolidate territory between Iraq and Syria into an autonomous region from which to operate. Many of the reasons for this have been previously mentioned: the ability to transfer weapons and extremists across borders; oppressive control over large populations of innocent civilians; and further degradation of already troubling humanitarian conditions across the region.

Canada and Canadians condemn in the strongest possible terms the barbaric methods of ISIS, such as the murder and rape of innocent women and children, the barbaric murder of American journalists and a British aid worker, and the repugnant killing of innocent civilians in northern Iraq, including the religious minorities.

The humanitarian toll this has taken on the local population is indeed a tragedy. Violence has displaced an estimated 850,000 people in Iraq. This brings the number of Iraqis who have had to flee their homes since the year began to 1.7 million, which represents one of the largest cases of internal displacement in the world. Armed clashes in northern Iraq have driven further displacement, causing the humanitarian context to deteriorate even further. The living conditions for many are desperate. They need water, food and shelter. They also need medical supplies.

In early August nearly 200,000 people made their way to Iraq's Kurdistan region or to disputed border areas. Thousands more reportedly fled across the border into Syria, then back again into the Kurdistan region as well. These people all need help but humanitarian efforts are hampered by the considerable deterioration of security conditions. An unknown number of civilians remain trapped in contested areas with limited access to services. They are living in vulnerable locations, some in schools, others in churches, many in mosques and unfinished buildings.

The influx of internally displaced people is also putting added strain on an already fragile health care structure. Many health

facilities are simply overwhelmed, incapable of fully managing a caseload docket that grows larger by the day.

Further, insecurity has interrupted normal supply routes, meaning food is not reaching the hungry. Just as worrisome, the next harvest will be impacted as nearly one-third of Iraq's wheat production comes from areas affected by the current conflict. Food security is becoming a growing concern.

These facts and figures tell quite a story and are enough to prompt any well-meaning country to join the relief effort. Canada recognized early its responsibility to assist and even before the United Nations declared that the situation in Iraq was a level 3 emergency, we had already committed resources to the humanitarian response.

On August 10, the Minister of International Development announced an assistance package of \$5 million delivered through four experienced humanitarian partners with long histories of activity in Iraq and robust organizations in the country. Development and Peace, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children Canada, and Mercy Corps have used our support to address the immediate humanitarian needs of those affected by the civil unrest.

• (1945)

On August 29, the minister announced an additional deployment of relief supplies from Canada's emergency stockpile to be distributed to conflict-affected people in northern Iraq. That stockpile is managed by the Canadian Red Cross. It is composed of relief items designed to meet the basic needs of populations in crisis, including tents, blankets, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, and jerry cans. Recently, in early September, the Minister of Foreign Affairs met with Kurdistan regional government officials to discuss their efforts to address the humanitarian and security situation in the region. At that meeting, he announced an additional \$7 million in humanitarian assistance.

Canada cares deeply about the current situation in Iraq and wants a resolution that allows Iraqis to regain at least some semblance of stability. This will not be easy, nor will it be quick. Still, we believe that with the international community's backing, Iraq, and the world, can overcome the ISIS threat, allowing us to shift our focus in Iraq from humanitarian assistance to development work.

In June, Iraq was identified as a development partner country for Canada. The details of our future development assistance program in Iraq are currently being explored and assessed, and the size of our financial envelope is still being determined. However, we do know that our focus in Iraq will be to advance the priorities that we seek to advance in all developing countries. These are increasing food security, securing the future of children and youth, stimulating sustainable economic growth, and supporting governance.

There is hope for Iraq, for its future and the future well-being of its people. With its humanitarian assistance and eventual development programming, Canada intends to play an important role in that progress.

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Canada is committed to helping all those affected. We are currently one of the top donors and have provided over \$28 million in humanitarian aid since the beginning of 2014. Canadians should rightly be proud of this contribution. Canada will continue to work closely with our allies to determine how we can best continue to support the needs of Iraqi civilians, particularly religious minorities.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for undertaking to have this debate tonight. It is one that Canadians need to participate in and I am very grateful that we have the opportunity to bring these issues to the floor of the House.

● (1950)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to just put on the record that it was June 13 that I asked a question to the government about the crisis at the time. My question was the following:

Mr. Speaker, the violence in Iraq is growing. Aid groups are warning of a looming crisis that will spin out of control.

This week half a million people—

It has grown since then.

—fled Mosul after a heavily armed terrorist group took over the city. Iraq is already struggling to provide aid to [the] Syrian refugees...

What is the government doing to help with the crisis? Specifically, what concrete steps is it taking to help with the refugee crisis?

What I got as a response from the parliamentary secretary was nothing. He just said they were concerned about this and they felt sorry for the victims.

I asked that question in June, saying that this crisis was going to deepen. It has deepened, and sadly it is going to deepen further. We had commitments at committee when I asked the foreign affairs minister about the following: support for victims of sexual violence, support for refugees and to build camps, support to bring the perpetrators to justice, and also to protect minorities.

We have heard about the military commitment, where is the further humanitarian assistance that they said they were going to pledge?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that it took the member of the opposition until June to ask those questions. As I stated in my comments earlier, we have been active in Iraq for quite some time. We have spent over \$28 million there since the beginning of 2014. Since 2009, we have supported one in every 10 refugees around the world and we have brought them into Canada. We have brought in, since 2009, 18,200 refugees, mostly from Iraq. We have committed to another 5,000 Iraqi refugees coming from Turkey.

It is unfortunate that it took the opposition until June to come up with these questions. We have been active there for a long time, supporting organizations that are doing humanitarian work on the ground. We will continue to assess the situation. We want to ensure that the people, particularly the affected religious minorities, are getting the attention they need. We will continue to work with our partners and ensure that happens.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are currently 1.8 million people displaced over 1,500 locations. Only about 100,000 internally displaced persons, or IDPs, are in camps. Families and children are living in construction sites, under bridges,

on the road. There are too many to assist. Shelter planning needs to be accelerated and more shelter needs to be urgently established.

I am wondering what more the government is doing to meet imminent weather-related needs of internally displaced families. Will Canada play a supportive role in providing funding for additional shelter?

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, again I reiterate that Canada has been working in Iraq for quite some time. When we announced the funding in August, we announced funding that is going to three particular organizations that have long histories of working in Iraq: the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mercy Corps, and Save the Children. We also recently announced the establishment of another facility in the UAE from which we can deploy, very quickly, the emergency supplies that are necessary for crisis-torn areas, and that will be an area from which we will be drawing the supplies.

We depend on these organizations that have a lengthy history of working in conflict areas and we are very thankful for the work that they do. We will continue to support those people.

● (1955)

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie for bringing forward tonight's debate as part of the ongoing discussion we are having among members of Parliament, government and the opposition parties, on the situation in Iraq.

As we just heard, this is a humanitarian crisis. I am glad that the Government of Canada has already pledged over \$28 million in humanitarian aid. I would also like to remind members that we have also committed \$15 million in security aid to Iraq since the beginning of this year, and we are delivering critical military supplies donated by our allies to Iraqi security forces in northern Iraq. As well, as was mentioned earlier today, Canada has initiated the deployment of 69 military advisers to serve in the north.

Our military advisers will work with the U.S. and our coalition partners to provide strategic and tactical advice to Iraqi security forces as they battle the ruthless and cruel terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL.

I can proudly state that their deployment and the deployment of the Canadian Special Operations Forces represents a significant step by this government in taking our turn at stopping ISIL's devastating advance.

Last Tuesday, I had the opportunity to attend the special committee meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on this very topic. Although just a week has passed since that meeting, events are developing quickly. The continuing brutality of ISIL was once again demonstrated this past weekend with the barbaric murder of British aid worker David Haines.

It is clear that, if ISIL is left unchecked, its savage menace will only grow into a greater regional and indeed a global security challenge that will ultimately threaten the security of Canadians all around the world. ISIL must be stopped.

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Two weeks ago in Wales at the NATO summit, the Prime Minister made a statement regarding the Government of Canada's response to the situation in Iraq. The Prime Minister announced the deployment of members of the Canadian Armed Forces to Iraq. Specifically, the Canadian Armed Forces members will provide strategic and tactical advice to Iraqi forces with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of operations against this extremist group.

Canada is a world leader when it comes to the provision of military training, capacity-building and mentorship outside the NATO community. The Canadian Armed Forces have significant experience in hostile regions where armed insurgency is rife. Again, I have to stress that it is important to note that our forces in Iraq will be present in an advisory and assistance role, not a combat role. The deployment is for a period of up to 30 days and will be reassessed at that time. This deployment is in support of Iraqi security forces in the north and occurs with the full and willing consent of the Iraqi government because, as everyone in this House should agree, any long-term solution to Iraq's stability is first and foremost an Iraqi responsibility.

Canada is not alone in offering assistance to the Government of Iraq. In recent days, an international coalition led by the United States has coalesced to confront the ISIL threat. Hon. members will have heard the statement by U.S. President Obama last week. In this statement he announced that the U.S. will lead a broad coalition to degrade and destroy ISIL.

He also outlined a four-pronged strategy to succeed in this mission: first, a systematic campaign of airstrikes at ISIL military targets; second, increased funding and practical support to the Iraqi security forces fighting ISIL on the ground; third, stepping up counterterrorism efforts against ISIL, especially in areas such as cutting off its financial sources and seeking to counter radicalization; and fourth, increasing the humanitarian aid to the region to help those who have been displaced by the ISIL threat.

Of course, to get humanitarian aid to those who are in the most need, those who have been persecuted, brutalized and terrorized by ISIL, we have to bring security to that region to deliver that aid.

As everyone can recognize, Canada's role thus far has been crucial to the success of this strategy. In all our military collaborations abroad, Canada always rises to the occasion and is receptive to the needs of our partner nations on the ground. Our assistance will be crucial. Our soldiers are highly educated and professional. They possess incredible technical skills and have been battle-tested in some of the most austere and dangerous environments in the world, including Afghanistan, where they worked closely with their U.S. and NATO counterparts to fight insurgents and protect allied forces during Operation Enduring Freedom.

● (2000)

The high level of expertise, readiness and maturity that our Special Operations Forces have attained through their work and training give them the technical and diplomatic skills they need to support, advise and instruct.

Canadian Armed Forces deployment represents an immediate and significant step that this government is taking to turn back ISIL's devastating advance in Iraq and Syria.

In addition to the deployment of military advisers that I have already mentioned, I also want to talk about the critical delivery system that we have put in place to support military supplies being delivered to the Iraqi security forces. As has already been mentioned, CC-130J Hercules and CC-177 Globemaster aircraft are being used to support almost 100 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force stationed in the Mediterranean. They are engaged, and they began flying flights back on August 28. They are delivering military supplies donated by our allies, including Albania. This week, we started delivering supplies from the Czech Republic.

I can confirm that, as of today, 18 flights by the Royal Canadian Air Force have taken place, delivering over 850,000 pounds of military supplies from our allies. That includes things like 1,000 helmets, 6,600 protective vests and 1,760 pieces of body armour that were donated by the Netherlands. They were transported to the Mediterranean by Denmark, airlifted by Canada, unloaded by the United States and coordinated by the United Kingdom. This provides an excellent example of the close co-operation between allies that has characterized the international response to the situation in Iraq.

Again, while this is not a combat mission, this mission is not without risk, and as always, our men and women in uniform are ready to answer the call. I think everyone in the House will join me and all Canadians in thanking them for always being prepared to defend Canadian values and interests in this increasingly dangerous world.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too was at the meeting last week, and we did not get the kind of detail that was asked for at that time. In fact, it has taken almost a full week to get the number of Canadian troops that are being sent to Iraq. Apparently, they are going to land and not wear their boots when they hit the ground.

Could the member be a bit more specific about what aspects of the special forces are going? There are four units of the Canadian special forces, including the JTF2, the Canadian Special Operations Regiment and the 427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron. Which of these units are being sent, or is it a combination of them?

The member mentioned diplomatic assistance as well. Is that part of this same group?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, as we know from our experience in Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere, members of the Canadian Armed Forces are often engaged in diplomacy as they meet with local leaders at a community, state or provincial level, as well as working with their colleagues at a national level. Being an officer within the Canadian Armed Forces is also being a diplomat and an ambassador of Canada.

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I will not go into detail of who is coming from where, since those are national security concerns, but I can tell members that they are coming from across the spectrum of the Canadian Armed Forces and that they are doing exactly what was decided upon by the advance team that went over there to determine how they would best fit in with the situation on the ground, as well as with the forces with whom they are going to be co-operating and advising.

I can also say that after watching the Leader of the Opposition just speak, with his flawed reasoning, I am still somewhat astounded that the NDP is going to be opposed to this type of serious role that Canada has decided to take, as it always has in working with allies to confront any threat to Canada or to our friends and neighbours head-on, rather than to just act like a turtle, tuck tail and run.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, multinational operations are always very complex and take a while to organize. Here, we are talking about many members of the coalition. I myself remember, from when I was in the navy, participating in the Standing Naval Force Atlantic, a NATO squadron made up of many different countries, that it is very complex.

I am not expecting an answer from the government tonight, but one of the questions that has come up deals with the Kurdish forces, the Peshmerga. In some places, I have read that they are not going to move from where they are. In other words, they are going to maintain a defensive line to protect the Kurdish region. Is it, in fact, already decided that they will stay there and be purely defensive, or will they, at some point, possibly move into an offensive posture and advance out of the Kurdish region?

Can the government shed some light on that? When that information is known, I would certainly like to know about it.

• (2005)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, as that situation evolves and as we have better information, we will for sure be willing to share that with the members. That is why we always say we are co-operating with the Iraqi government and with security forces in the north, including Peshmerga, as we go forward in ensuring that the ISIL threat is dealt with appropriately.

We do believe strongly that ISIL needs to be taken down to assure the people it has been terrorizing, using rape of young girls and women as a weapon, killing ethnic and religious minorities, that this is something that has to stop. We know that if we do not confront ISIL, if we do not work with our allies, if we do not work with the Iraqi government and its security forces from a regional and national level, we will not defeat this terrorist organization.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the Leader of the Opposition, and it appears that he has his head in the sand along with his NDP colleagues in this whole ISIL issue. They do not seem to recognize that, in fact, there is a crisis in Iraq and Syria. It will expand in the Middle East and globally.

There have been reports of Canadians who have joined ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and some of them have died while participating in the front-line fighting. I am wondering if my colleague could make a comment on that.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I know that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has already dealt with some of these matters, stating and pointing out that Canada already has in place some of the strongest anti-terrorist laws in the world, going after those who decide to take their terror from Canada abroad, who are leaving Canada. We are going to restrict passports. We will revoke passports and citizenship for those who are dual nationals if they are taking their terrorism and being radicalized and not only going overseas to fight but want to return to Canada. We want to make sure that we quash this at home and at the same time make sure that we do not see that return to Canada.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to take part in the debate, but it is unfortunate, to be polite, that we are not able to have a full debate on a motion from the government which we would then vote on. It was clearly outlined by our leader tonight why that should happen.

Not only is it the desire of our party that Parliament have its say on this matter, after all it is our responsibility as parliamentarians to ensure we are aware, with eyes wide open, when we send our Canadian Forces abroad, but we believe, and we thought the Prime Minister believed in this, that when we send forces abroad, we should have a full debate and vote on it.

It is stunning. To look across the way, the Conservatives have a majority and they know that whatever motion they put forward, it will pass. We know how the Conservative government works, and it would not be a free vote, that is for sure. It is interesting that the government would not be fulsome and transparent.

The Conservatives say that they are being transparent. Why not put a motion in front of the House for all Canadians so we can debate exactly what we are getting into? It is extraordinarily important that we do this, and it has already been enumerated why in recent history.

No, we did not end up going to Iraq, but we ended up going, as a quid pro quo, well documented, to Kandahar. We ended up being unprepared, and everyone agrees with that, when we were in Kandahar. We did not have a vote, we did not have a debate, and look what happened.

Here we are again, and we simply are asking the government to fulfill its own commitment, to say that when we send forces abroad, we define it.

Let us go over what we have seen from the government this past summer.

This past summer we were contacted by the government to say that it was thinking of providing lift capacity, or planes, to particularly help the Yazidis who were isolated because of the ISIL and whose lives were in danger. The government wanted to provide humanitarian support. The leader of our party said that we were absolutely behind that. This then turned into something else, because it was determined that was not needed and we were to give lift capacity for other needs.

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Then there was the matter of being invited to go and do an assessment on the ground in Iraq. I was in Baghdad with my Liberal colleague and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We met with the president of Iraq, the speaker and Iraq's foreign affairs minister. We then went on to Erbil, which I had visited in 2007. We met with the president of the regional government there.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague for St. John's East, Mr. Speaker.

We heard that every one of the representatives, be it from Baghdad, Erbil, the United Nations refugee representative, including our ambassador who was in Amman but is responsible for Iraq, has asked for humanitarian support. There was a crisis and they needed that support immediately. That is exactly what the message was from our assessment.

Lo and behold, while we were there in Iraq, an announcement was made by the Prime Minister in Wales that we were committing troops. According to the press, a committee of cabinet decided that we would commit troops. It would be interesting to find out from the government who was on this committee. However, it was very surprising to me and somewhat surprising to the Minister of Foreign Affairs it seemed.

This is why we need this debate because we are hearing different things. We hear that there is going to be dozens, or there is going to be 100. The Prime Minister says that there are 69 special forces in Iraq. Then we hear it is not 69 actually there, but there are 69 special forces getting ready to be deployed and that they will be taking arms from the Czech Republic and bringing them to the theatre. Then we hear there are also special forces that will be helping with advisory and assisting, whatever that means. My colleague from Toronto—Danforth made some interesting points about how that could be interpreted as per the Australian mission.

This is why we need to have absolute clarity on what our mission is. It is why we need a motion. It is why we need debate and why we need a vote.

My colleague who I travelled with me to Iraq he heard what I heard. The most important thing that we both heard was the need for humanitarian assistance.

If we were going to have soldiers go and build refugee camps, the government would probably find support from this side, but we are not hearing that. What we are hearing about is special ops to advise and assist for something we do not know about.

● (2010)

The member who is chirping at me does not even know, it seems. He is certainly not disclosing it, so we have to do it. Why? Because of the recent horrific violence we have seen on Iraqi people, and particularly the minority Yazidis, the Christians and the Mandaeans who have been through so much already. This is the third wave. This is not new to them.

The Christians were pushed out of Mosul as well as the Yazidis. That started in 2006. There was a second wave in 2008, and here we are again, so this is not new. It started in 2003 because of the invasion. There was no al Qaeda in Iraq before 2003. Everyone knows that. It was the creation of the void and the vacuum because

of the Sunni-Shiite split, and everyone knows that. Who paid the price? The minorities, which the government claims to support and protect, yet all we have are words.

Last week I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs if he would support humanitarian refugee support immediately and help those victims of sexual violence, protecting minorities. I mean no disrespect to Ambassador Bennett for Religious Freedoms, but he is not able to protect the religious minorities.

The religious minorities, particularly the Christians, told us that they could not go back home, that they needed the support immediately and that they did not want to leave their country. They were clear on that, and my colleague would know that. They needed to have protection where they were. Why is our government not announcing that support? Why did we not hear robust support for the refugees who are living right now in the cold? I mean that metaphorically and I mean it physically in a couple of months, because they do not have anywhere to go. Every school is filled. The kids cannot go to school because of the refugees there.

People are living on the streets in Dohuk, just north of Mosul. They do not have the basic needs. They do not have water or sanitation. They want our help. That is what we should be doing here. Instead, what I thought was the assessment and we would provide that support immediately, we have a government that cannot tell us what we are doing on a military mission. My God, we should be providing the humanitarian assistance now, stepping up to the plate. Other countries have done it. Damn it, that is what Canada's role is here. That is what Canada should be doing, building refugee camps, providing that health support, ensuring those who have been victimized by rape get the support they need, the psychosocial support. That is what our fight should be.

Our fight is not to go in and do what obviously did not work out for the Americans before. While I am on my feet, it is extraordinarily important to underline the fact that even after we have 10 countries in the region which are supporting this coalition, which has no UN mandate, no NATO support even, which is very important, we do not have commitment from Arab countries to actually put boots on the ground.

When we have that, not to the extent that our friends in the states are looking for, when people in the region are not willing to do something to the extent that we want them to, with the exception of the Kurds, why we would send troops there with an ill-defined mission when we know what the needs are for the humanitarian support, the protection for religious minorities and minority groups? Prevention of this kind of crime is something that we all want to see, but we need to do it in a straightforward manner, a manner that would help those who have been victimized. It is something we should be doing immediately.

However, to have an ill-defined mission, without clarity, and sending our men and women abroad without that is a disservice to them. It is a disservice to Canadians and it takes away from what the focus should be, which is support for the humanitarian assistance to be provided.

Standing Order 52

• (2015)

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have just had the definition of an ill-defined mission from the member opposite. He wants to protect minorities who we agree are in danger, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, many of whom have been resettled in Canada. More of them are stranded on mountains, fearing for their very lives in villages. However, he wants to do it without a military mission. There is no way to protect minorities, to protect these civilian populations without effective military action by Iraqi state forces, and they have asked for our support.

It is incredible that members opposite complain about the lack of a vote having, on this opposition day, forfeited the possibility of having a debate on just this issue that would have come to a vote.

Does the member opposite understand what he has heard here today, that this is a non-combat mission. It is an advisory mission for very specific numbers of Canadian Forces members, numbers that have been given in the House today, and that as such, it is unlike our first deployment to Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, which was a combat mission from day one, and more like the training and advisory mission that we had for the last few years of our time in Afghanistan. Does he understand that elementary distinction?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, putting aside that paternalistic, pathetic tone, we do understand. We understand that the government has changed the commitment day by day. It cannot even tell us the basic numbers. It may be 69. They may be going, but we do not know.

Let us put that aside and put a circle around the fact that the member was not there. He can chirp all he wants, but he was not with us when we were asked by the religious minorities, by the bishops and others who represent the religious minorities, to provide humanitarian support. They said that they could not go back to Mosul, and they are not going back. They need support right now to build communities. They do not want to leave their country, but they do need to have safety right now. That is what they have asked us to do.

I cannot understand why the minister of all people, who has been abroad, does not get that we should be responding to that urgent need.

• (2020)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to confirm with my hon. colleague that there was a demand for humanitarian aid. There is no question that there is a crying need for humanitarian aid and we have made that very clear. Hopefully the government will act on that.

There is a flip side to the coin and the flip side is this. If we do not want those refugee camps in northern Iraq to be there for many years, we have to do something about ISIS. There is a problem here, because if nothing is done by anybody about ISIS, even those refugee camps will be threatened eventually.

I think I heard tonight my hon. colleague from the NDP say more or less clearly, as did the Leader of the Opposition, that they do not want to get involved in any way militarily, that other countries can

do that job and that we are only in there to do stuff like humanitarian help. Is that in fact what I understood this evening?

Mr. Paul Dewar: He has part of it right, Mr. Speaker. I said that we have to provide humanitarian support because that is what he and I heard and were asked for. It was actually emphatic and the member knows this. We were told by President Barzani as well as the foreign minister that they did not need our boots on the ground, that this was not their critical need right now. They told us they needed humanitarian support. It could not have been clearer. I wish everyone in the House and Canadians had been in those meetings with us. That is what they asked for and that is what we should be giving them.

On the other part, what does the member want? He was talking about imbedding. He was talking about a long conflict.

Is the member saying right now to Canadians that the Liberal Party wants to commit troops for the long haul? That is what I hear him saying. If he is saying that, then yes, I am dead set against that without some definition of what they are going to be doing.

After all, we do not have to teach the Peshmerga how to fight. They are capable of doing that. Our going to northern Iraq to teach the Peshmerga how to fight is a big question mark in my mind. I was there in 2007. I saw how well disciplined they are. They have taken it to ISIL. The problem is ISIL has better arms. Where did it get the arms? The arms came from the Iraqi army that fled, but it was provided arms by the Americans.

We have a problem here of inequity in terms of arms, but not about who should fight. If it is a matter of taking the fight to ISIL, let us leave it to the people who are right there right now, and that is the Peshmerga. We do not have to send Canadian forces to do that.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in this debate tonight. It is an important debate because it underscores an important point that has been made many times by our party, a point joined in by the Prime Minister in 2004, 2005, 2006, and later. It is that for the deployment of Canadian troops, we need a vote in Parliament and that Parliament has the right to make that decision.

We have learned, of course, that it is not something that the Prime Minister wants to do, and he seems to have the full support of the Liberals.

I want to underscore that by saying that we are talking about a mission that is being undertaken without basic questions being answered. Last Tuesday, a week ago, there was a meeting of the defence committee after the commitment had been made, and after the commitment had been made, by the way, without the request of the Iraqi government. Otherwise, why would the Prime Minister say the government is going to send troops to Iraq once it gets the consent of the Iraqi government? Therefore, this is not at the request of the Iraqi government, despite what members opposite have said. We do not know where this mission is going.

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Last week when we asked what was going to happen after 30 days, the answer was, “We don't know. Things are changing all the time. We're not really sure what it is going to be.” When we asked what criteria were going to be used to determine where we go from here, up or down, or whether we bring the troops back home, the answer was, “We don't know.” No criteria were laid out. No numbers were given.

It took until today to even get a number from the Prime Minister, and that was after the embarrassment of being left without an answer again and again when a very simple question was being asked and after the U.S. president stated exactly how many additional troops he was sending, which will be 475 troops in addition to the 1,200 who are already there. At least the Americans set out what they were going to do, but we could not find out what our government was intending to do.

When we asked when the troops will depart, the answer was “We can't tell you that. What do you want? The flight numbers would be a security problem.” The Conservatives could not even answer exactly what the troops were going to do. They had to rely on the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie to make a suggestion and then have the Conservatives tell him whether he was right or wrong. That was the most ridiculous briefing that any opposition has ever gotten from a government. A member of the opposition had to go so far as to make a suggestion so that he would have it on the record that we are behind some non-existent wire.

We heard yesterday and tonight from the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie that this is going to last for years and that Canadians had better get used to the idea that this is a long-term mission. We heard similar remarks from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

What, then, is this debate for tonight? Is it to soften up the Canadian public to the idea that we could be there for three or four or five years, and that after 30 days, we are going to have something else, something that we call “mission creep”? The government does not want to even acknowledge that there is such a thing.

The people I talk to are universally saying that they do not want to be dragged into a war in Iraq, yet today, only a week after the President of the United States announced this mission and was trying to build a coalition, there are reports out of the U.S. about the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the equivalent of our CDS, talking about the possibility of advisers accompanying Iraqi troops in attacks against ISIL targets.

That is very reminiscent of the Vietnam War a long time ago. President Kennedy sent military “advisers” to Vietnam, and that led to an incredibly long and destructive war that the Americans eventually lost in 1975. We have had mission creep before, and already we are hearing hints of advisers being used as troops and participating in attacks.

We can say that they are there to advise and assist, but, as was pointed out earlier, what exactly does that mean? We are talking about special forces. We are not talking about advisers teaching people how to do particular things; we are talking about special forces troops, boots on the ground, and all the equipment that goes with that.

●(2025)

As retired Colonel Steve Day pointed out on *Question Period* the other day, of course they have the right to defend themselves. They will be there as troops.

As has been pointed out as well, there is no wire that the troops are behind or not behind. My colleague, the foreign affairs critic for the NDP, the member for Ottawa Centre, and the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie were there two weeks ago, and they were within firing distance of ISIL forces that they could see.

This is an asymmetrical war. There is no wire. It is not on a base in Kandahar, behind a wire. This is an asymmetrical war that the Peshmerga are fighting, a war that they have to fight to defend themselves.

What we are talking about is Canadian participation. We are talking about what we are doing and whether or not we have the mandate to do it. The government has been long on rhetoric and very short on the facts of the mandate and the goals. It is called a 30-day mission; that timeline is meaningless. I think everybody agrees that very little can really be accomplished within 30 days.

What we are saying is we are going to assess the situation. What does that lead to? We can be sure, given what we have heard from both the government and in the support of the opposition Liberals, that there will be more to come.

We do not know what the real intentions of the government are. We are very unconvinced by the speeches that we have heard, particularly from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration this evening, as to what exactly is going on. What battle is it we are involved in? Are we involved? Are we expected to be involved in the battle, as the member phrases it? The battle that the ISIL people think they are involved in is a battle to take over the entire Middle East from Spain to India. Is that the battle that the member believes we are involved in? Does he really think that we in the West should be playing that game and aggrandizing the nasty work that is being done by the ISIL group?

We are in full agreement with Security Council resolution 2170. Unanimously adopted on August 15, it calls on member states of the United Nations to take measures to prevent people from going to join this group by adopting serious measures and sanctions and all of the things that are laid out there. It recognizes that gross, systematic, and widespread abuse of human rights is being carried on by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. This is a full statement decrying this action.

For the record, I want to say that we are fully supportive of the condemnation of what this group is doing. It is criminal activity of the worst kind. It is an abuse of human rights. This resolution also calls for ensuring that the perpetrators of these actions are brought to justice. These are international criminal breaches of human rights.

However, we are not talking about that here. We are talking about a military mission of a different sort, and we know not where it will lead. We know not where it would lead Canadian forces.

Standing Order 52

We do not really have faith that this government is now being forthcoming about what it is doing. We have no faith, and Canadians have no faith, in what the government's real intentions are and where it will take people.

I know there is someone who wants to yap across the way. I am sure he will have an opportunity to speak if he wishes. I know he has regretted things he has said in the past; I hope he is prepared to be quiet now and listen.

Unfortunately, there is a grave concern in this country that the government is about to take us down a road that leads to more involvement by the Canadian Forces and by our country in what may well be a very long-term mission in a country and place where we chose 10 years ago to not go. We are now suffering from the consequences of a mission that was undertaken there over many years and then left behind. The problems were left behind.

● (2030)

There is a crisis there. There is no doubt about that. We have a crisis in Libya as well, but we are not going there to solve the crisis left over after the Libyan mission went on to mission creep and left the country afterwards to a civil war and the destruction going on there now.

This is the concern we have. This is why we want a full disclosure from the government, a full debate. Once we have the cards on the table, we must have a vote in the House. That is what must happen.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has said that he supports the sanctions against ISIL. We have heard that it is very serious, that the organization has already spread, and that if it is left unchecked, it could spread even further.

At what point would the NDP support actions from Canada of a military nature? Would it be after something has happened in Canada? Would it ever support having our Canadian Armed Forces becoming involved?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question. It is a legitimate question. We have answered that question in the past. In fact, we answered that question by supporting the mission to Libya when backed by United Nations—

An hon. member: Sort of.

Mr. Jack Harris: The member says “sort of”, Mr. Speaker. We backed that motion and we voted on it in the House and we supported it, but guess what happened? Mission creep. The effort to provide some support based on the responsibility to protect turned into a very different mission.

The mission then became that we had to get Gadhafi. We had to destroy the government totally. Then everybody left, and what was left behind was a country that was unable to govern itself. There was civil war, which is continuing now, followed by destruction into Mali and other things. That was based on the fact that mission creep took over. The nation building that was required did not take place. The assistance to form a stable government did not take place. We are now left with a mess in Libya, south of Libya in the desert, and in Mali. We are seeing the same thing in the Iraq situation for similar reasons.

● (2035)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad we are having this debate, but I am finding it difficult to understand what the NDP's real position is.

At the beginning of the evening it seemed to be that they needed more details so that we can fully understand what is involved in this mission that is being proposed by the government. However, the last two speakers gave me the impression that what the NDP really wanted was more humanitarian aid—with which I agree—but not to be involved militarily, either because the Peshmerga and the Iraqi forces can take care of their own country and do not need our help, or possibly because enough other coalition members will go in there and do the hard work of helping to get rid of ISIS.

Is it that New Democrats would like to have more details and may decide to step up to the plate and support this initial mission, or is it that they really do not want to get involved at all?

It would be nice to get a good honest answer.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, once again I note the patronizing comments.

We are here to debate a serious matter involving a commitment of Canadian troops to a foreign operation, without a UN mandate. We want to know exactly where this is leading Canadians, but we have not had that answer.

We made it very clear that humanitarian assistance can and should be provided. That is something that we can support wholeheartedly. We are not prepared to support the deployment of troops without a full knowledge of where Canadians are being taken, how far we are prepared to go, and whether, as the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie is saying, Canadians better get prepared for the long haul because we could be in for two or three years. Everybody knows this is not going to be over in 30 days.

The people who are not being honest here are the Conservatives. As well, I do not think the Liberals are being intellectually honest when they say they fully support what the government is doing, because they do not know what the government is doing any more than we do.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Mississauga—Streetsville. It is an honour to rise in the House today to speak on the troubling situation in Iraq. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for granting the request for an emergency debate on this serious situation and to discuss the government's ongoing response.

The spread of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, has been accompanied by heinous acts of brutality against Iraq's religious minority communities. In August, we witnessed the harrowing scenes of tens of thousands of Yazidis stranded in the Sinjar mountains, men, women and children who fled en masse under the threat of torture, enslavement and death at the hands of ISIL.

The persecution of Iraq's Christian communities has been no less brutal. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians have now fled their homes, having been faced with the stark choice of the advancing Islamist militants: submit to Islam, flee, or be killed.

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By some estimates, we are now witnessing the near total disappearance of Christians from the region. Whereas the population included more than one million Christians prior to 2003, including over 600,000 in Baghdad and tens of thousands more in Mosul and in Kirkuk as of late July, these numbers are estimated to have dwindled to less than 400,000 with many more having now fled Iraq as the violence has accelerated over the past six weeks. The incredible loss that this represents for Iraq, for the region and for the world cannot be overstated.

The 2,000-year-old Iraqi Christian community was founded by the immediate successors to the Apostles. It has made substantial contributions to the economic, intellectual and cultural heritage of the Middle East. However, most crucially, the pluralism fostered by the existence of these communities alongside their Muslim neighbours is a crucial ingredient in fostering the tolerance, respect and pluralism that Iraq must embrace for it to achieve everlasting stability. Without a stable presence of Christians and religious minorities in Iraq, the chances of building a democratic country grounded in respect for the rule of law is greatly diminished.

We recognize that the perpetrators of these acts of violence are adherents to a twisted religious ideology motivated by a belief in a divine call to war against the enemies of Islam. This is a spreading cancer. The hateful ideology that motivates ISIL is also fuelling violence in East Africa, in Nigeria, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and throughout the Middle East. While the government has rightly directed the Canadian military to support our friends and allies in stopping ISIL's advance on the ground, military force alone cannot root out the long-term threat posed by Islamic extremism.

For this reason, the government is also focused on advancing the cause of religious freedom in Iraq as part of our overarching response to the crisis. This means that beyond our short-term efforts to protect religious communities that have fled the violence, we recognize that a stable Iraqi government, grounded first in religious tolerance and ultimately in religious freedom, is the only reliable way out of this spiral of violence, persecution and death being fostered by the extremist views of the Islamists.

The majority of Muslims in Iraq and throughout the world deplore the false interpretation of Islam in whose name the violence is being perpetrated. However, they must also recognize that the extremism flourishes in an environment without respect and tolerance for religious diversity and religious difference. Legal and social restrictions on religious freedom, including the prohibitions against blasphemy and apostasy that we have seen elsewhere in Muslim majority countries, cannot be allowed to take hold in Iraq; not just because they infringe on the rights of Christians and other minorities to practise their faiths, but because they discourage the liberalizing voices within Islam that are crucial to countering the influences of the extremists in the long term.

This is precisely why the government has committed to advancing freedom of religion as a central component of our response to the situation in Iraq.

• (2040)

Through the Office of Religious Freedom, we will be working over the medium- and long-term to promote interfaith dialogue, to encourage understanding and respect between Iraq's religious

communities, and to help build a political and social framework that allows all Iraqis to express their faith freely and without fear. To that end, over the next two to three months, the Office of Religious Freedom is working to identify, in collaboration with implementing partner organizations, a number of initiatives to assist in these efforts. We will also be reaching out to friends and allies to build recognition of the important role religious freedom will play in ensuring long-term, sustainable peace in Iraq and the ultimate defeat of Islamist-fuelled violence.

Our ambassador for religious freedom, Dr. Andrew Bennett, is also conducting outreach with the Canadian-Iraqi religious community, including members of the Syriac and Chaldo-Assyrian churches, the Yazidis, representatives from the Jewish community, and Shia and Sunni Muslim community leaders, to identify how best to help Iraq's threatened religious communities and support longer term tolerance and freedom. Ambassador Bennett has also held a fruitful discussion with a number of faith-based aid organizations, such as the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and Aid to the Church in Need, to explore opportunities for a partnership with Canada on the ground. As a multicultural and multi-faith society, Canada is uniquely called to promote the peaceful coexistence of Iraq's various religious and ethnic communities. We have a rich and proud tradition of diversity, respect and tolerance, a tradition that has yielded peace and prosperity for our people. Through our engagement in Iraq, we will honour this tradition by acting against hate and persecution, by championing the values of pluralism and religious freedom, and supporting Iraqis as they work to build a more stable future.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, which includes CFB Petawawa, I am proud to acknowledge the Canadian Special Operations Regiment, CSOR, which is headquartered in Petawawa. CSOR was established in 2006 and is the first new Canadian regiment to be stood up since 1968 when the Canadian Airborne Regiment was created. On that note, the politically motivated decision to disband the airborne regiment was wrong. In today's troubled world, I know that Canadians would benefit from those skills.

As Canadians are aware, CSOR members have been deployed to Iraq to advise and provide intelligence first-hand to the Canadian government about the situation in Iraq and the threat posed by ISIL. On behalf of the Canadian government, I wish to thank the Petawawa families of serving soldiers for the important role they play in keeping the home fires burning.

• (2045)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the debate is about whether or not the government should put a vote into Parliament on this specific issue, because it is going back on the exact policies it has put in place. Unlike President Obama, who made a televised address in which he laid out America's plan in Iraq in some detail, we are being dictated to on what the government is doing without really telling us what it is doing. The whole issue is that the government is again sending in our troops without really defining the mission, which is very problematic. That is why we need to have that conversation.

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Maybe the member can answer a couple of questions. Was this specific deployment directly requested by the Iraqi government? Was it requested by the UN? Was it requested by NATO?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the government of Iraq did request our assistance in this matter and our troops are there to advise.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has detailed how ISIL continues to show deliberate disregard for human rights by intentionally targeting religious minorities and civilians, including children and aid workers. I know the government has committed approximately \$28 million in aid to the region, but the Minister of Foreign Affairs has called the current levels insufficient.

Will the government provide additional aid to the region and what form will this take?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, that is in part precisely why we have troops on the ground. It is to assess the situation to see what exactly is needed for the future.

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, for her excellent presentation and for all the hard work she does on the Standing Committee on National Defence and her strong support for the Canadian Armed Forces and the brave men and women who serve.

I appreciate the comments she made about the Canadian special operations forces and the expertise that they bring to the field and also her comments highlighting the risks that Canadians are facing because of ISIL. I would ask if she could go into a little more detail, talking about how ISIL is more than just a brutal terrorist regime that is terrorizing ethnic and religious minorities within Iraq and what type of regional and global security threat they represent.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, it is well documented in the media how ISIL is using the social network to recruit Canadians, Americans, and people from all countries. The threat escalates in that if we do not keep what is happening in check where it is occurring right now, in the Middle East, North Africa and potentially spreading into Europe, then there is no doubt that the potential for attacks within North America can happen.

There is no limit. Having seen how quickly this spread already across Syria and Iraq, it could spread across continents.

● (2050)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a lot of confusion and contradictions surround this mission.

I heard the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke say that the role of the Canadian military personnel on the ground will be to evaluate aid needs. At the same time, we were told earlier that the personnel was there to advise. Well, a lot of organizations who are already there on the ground know what is needed in terms of aid. I am therefore a little confused.

Will evaluating aid needs really be part of the role of the Canadian military personnel?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, in addition to humanitarian aid, the Canadian government will also be providing non-lethal protective gear for the people who are fighting along with the people in Iraq. Part of the assessment is to see what is needed, not only in humanitarian terms but in practical terms as well.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is deeply concerned about the recent increase in violence in Iraq and its humanitarian consequences. Canada certainly condemns, in the strongest terms, the targeting of civilians and religious minorities. We are deeply concerned about reports of possible war crimes and crimes against humanity. That is why we continue to call on all of the parties in the conflict to respect international humanitarian law.

In late August, I visited the cities of Erbil and Duhak in Iraq as part of an observer team, sponsored by the Reverend Majed El Shafie and One Free World International. We met personally with the internationally displaced persons, the IDPs, on the ground in the UNHCR camps that have been established. Their stories were heart-wrenching. We sat on the ground and in the tents of our fellow human beings. I have to say that their plight is unbelievable. This is an unspeakable tragedy, for which there is no excuse.

The humanitarian situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate as armed clashes between the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, as we know it, and government forces drive displacement. Since January, an estimated 1.7 million people have been displaced throughout the country, which represents one-third of the largest cases of international displacement in the world. Basic services, including health care and water infrastructure, are disrupted, resulting in an acute humanitarian need.

The intensity of fighting in ISIL-held areas has resulted in a security situation that does not allow humanitarian organizations to operate. The persecution of minority groups, whom I met with, including Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, and Shia Turkman, is an ongoing concern.

Current displacement near the Kurdish region of Iraq has been only the latest development in a trend of large-scale displacement across Iraq that goes back to the beginning of the year. In early 2014, conflict displaced an estimated 475,000 people in Anbar province. In June, an estimated 571,000 people were displaced from Mosul. In August, an additional 662,000 people were displaced from the Sinjar area, when tens of thousands of Yazidis remained trapped for several days in dire humanitarian conditions. The size and pace of displacement has overwhelmed the local communities, which I met with, including the Duhak Governorate, which is now hosting more than 400,000 internally displaced persons.

When I met with local officials in Duhak, we talked about their needs. I know that Canada will continue to help in providing assistance for housing and medical needs, particularly as the winter season approaches.

On August 12, the United Nations declared the situation a level 3 emergency, underlining the gravity of the crisis. As a result, the humanitarian response in accessible areas is being rapidly scaled up, and humanitarian leadership will be bolstered.

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Approximately 35% of internally displaced Iraqis are living in vulnerable conditions in schools, churches, mosques, and unfinished buildings. We met with the largest group of IDPs in a half-built school in Duhak the last day our delegation was there. There is a concern that the schools will have to be converted back to allow children, obviously, to attend school. They will have no place to go.

• (2055)

Canada is actively working with partners to address the children's needs and to see what more we can do. We are currently working through experienced partners, such as Save the Children and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to help provide child-friendly environments for displaced children and to give them the psychological support they need. We believe that when adults fight, children's education should not suffer and that the continued academic growth of children must be secured, even in the face of conflict.

The flow of IDPs has also placed considerable strain on health structures, and many health facilities are overwhelmed by large caseloads. I met with the director of health in Duhak and he explained these situations to me.

In addition, food security is a growing concern. Normal supply routes have been interrupted by conflict and insecurity. The next harvest is at risk in the areas affected by the conflict, and that accounts for nearly one-third of Iraq's wheat production. Millions of Iraqis are likely to face food shortages later this year unless the challenges are resolved.

A key challenge for the humanitarian community continues to be the difficulty of being able to get into the conflict areas to reach people who really need our help. The sheer number of different locations people have fled to, as well as their mobility, adds a layer of complexity that makes matters even more difficult for humanitarian organizations.

Canada is working through experienced humanitarian partners, such as the United Nations, humanitarian agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and non-governmental organizations, to get lifesaving assistance, and I saw it on the ground getting to those who need it.

Today Canada has provided more than \$28 million in humanitarian assistance to Iraq, of which \$18.8 million will address needs from the conflict and \$9.6 million will be used to address the needs of Syrian refugees who have sought refuge in Iraq due to the conflict in their own home country. We are working to provide support across a range of needs to ensure that there are no gaps.

Canada's funding is helping to meet the health, shelter, water and sanitation, protection and food needs of those who need it. For example, we are providing mobile health clinics through Plan Canada and are providing medical supplies to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Canadian Red Cross is currently looking to determine what more can be done. On August 28, our first planeload of humanitarian relief supplies arrived, and more will be done.

Canada is currently the fifth-largest donor to the response to the crisis, and it is worth noting that we are also the fifth-largest donor to

the UN's central emergency response fund that has provided more than \$10.8 million in response to the Iraq crisis.

When I was on the ground, we also had the opportunity to meet with our ambassador to Iraq and Jordan, Bruno Saccomani, and I asked him what we are doing on the ground. His report back to us was outstanding. Canada truly is a leader. We have shown great initiative and great support, and our people on the ground there are fully committed to making sure that Canada's role in humanitarian and other assistance to the Kurdish government and the Iraqi national government is clearly there.

It was a profoundly moving experience for me, as a member of the House, to visit Iraq to meet with the victims of these ISIL attacks. I will never forget that as long as I live. Fathers, mothers, children, grandpas, grandmas, friends of a community that had their friends and neighbours slaughtered in these attacks escaped with their lives to try to rebuild.

• (2100)

It was profoundly moving. I want to thank members of One Free World International for taking the time to invite me and two of our colleagues in this House to join them to meet with these people and to share Canada's support. May God continue to bless them all, and may we all pray for all of them, for peace, and for better days ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his testimony. I do not doubt for a split second his conviction and sensitivity, but what I find terrible about this conflict is that everything happening now was predictable years ago. The country has been destroyed and completely ravaged by war. Control of the situation has been taken by the group that is most fanatic, most hateful and most heavily armed. They are completely mad. For them, life has no meaning. Death is a release, a fulfillment. Their idea of complete success is to give their lives for the cause.

As the defence against people like that, we need people with a real interest in defending their territory. The Peshmerga, for example. *Peshmerga*, by the way, means "those who face death". They have been fighting for years.

If the Americans had taken the Kurds seriously from the outset, the situation in Iraq would never have degenerated to the point we have reached now. We have to start asking ourselves questions. Are we going to become the team that always does the cleaning up after the Americans have made a mess of things? Or are we going to end up admitting that we have to let people solve their own problems in their own countries? That does not prevent us from providing them with assistance, or even weapons.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I am a strong believer in exporting Canadian values around the world, and one of the strongest values we have is that we protect people who are being persecuted. We protect people who are being attacked. We stand with people who only due to the fact of their religious beliefs or their faith are being slaughtered around the world. Canadian values say that our Canadian government stands up for people who are being attacked simply because of their faith.

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I am very proud of the response of our government to date in humanitarian assistance but also because we have asked some of our brave women and men to go over to help. By the way, I met with people from the Peshmerga army over there, and they said they would love to have Canada's help and assistance to get them where they need to go to ensure that they fight this terrible organization, ISIL, and protect their people in Iraq.

• (2105)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his caring and compassionate speech. He spoke about an unspeakable tragedy, and \$28 million is not enough. In the words of the minister, it is insufficient, and we hope that more aid will be coming.

However, according to UNICEF Iraq, testimony gathered from displaced civilians in northern Iraq has revealed disturbing accounts of killing, abduction, and sexual violence perpetrated against women and children. The agony these girls and women are now suffering as a result of such ordeals requires an urgent scaling up in the provision of specialist mental health care and medical support as part of the broader response to this unfolding tragedy.

In June, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that “The time is now for the world to take action against sexual violence in conflict”. I would like to know how much of the aid for Iraq has been earmarked to combat sexual violence in conflict.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Etobicoke North because I know she has been very outspoken and passionate about this issue. She cares, just as we do, about the plight of the people on the ground, particularly women. I can tell her that we met with a number of people on the ground who told us the horrific stories of women who have been taken into slavery, daughters who have been sold by ISIL, and that is the reality on the ground.

I will continue to stand here and support and urge our government. Even though we have done very much, I will continue to push our government to do more specifically in these areas where I think we can provide a lot of humanitarian assistance to women in particular. Religious minorities are absolutely being devastated and persecuted in this situation, but women and children are suffering the most. I will give the member my support that I will continue to work with my government officials on this side of the House. We should do more to protect women and children in particular in this terrible situation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that we can definitely do for Iraq and that the Iraqis want us to do for them, and that is to provide humanitarian aid to alleviate an unbearable situation on the ground and help displaced persons within the country.

Thousands of families have had to leave the conflict zone. Over 1.5 million people are affected, including 1.2 million displaced persons. People always mention these figures when they talk about disasters in one place or another, but I am trying to think of it this way: 1.5 million people is the size of Montreal, or twice the size of our wonderful national capital. It is important to picture the number

of people who have been affected to their very core by this disaster and try to look beyond simple numbers.

These people have an urgent need for humanitarian aid. Current conditions are very difficult. These people have been displaced in unbearable 40-degree heat, and now winter is coming. People often think that winter in those areas is rather mild, but they are not. The winters can be very harsh.

The situation is so difficult that the United Nations has declared it a level-three emergency, which does not happen very often. It is rare for there to be several at a time, and unfortunately there are currently four: Syria, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Iraq.

These 1.2 million people need everything: food, water, shelter, medication and healthcare. They basically have nowhere to go because the neighbouring countries are already overwhelmed by the large number of Syrian refugees. Even Syria has a lot of Syrian refugees.

I forgot to mention that I will share my time with the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

These people have nowhere to go. They can only be displaced in a country that is already facing significant problems. These people want to stay in their country and do not want to leave. As I mentioned, that is not the issue for them. They need aid and particularly they need refugee camps.

My colleague from Ottawa Centre, the foreign affairs critic for the official opposition, went to Iraq. He told me when he came back that the people he spoke to only asked for aid and camps. I found that fascinating.

These people also need protection. Some of them are members of Christian or other minorities and they are persecuted and murdered. The conduct of the Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant is barbaric. In addition to the murders, there is a worrisome phenomenon that unfortunately is all too frequent in this type of situation: the use of rape as a weapon of war and sexual violence against women, girls and boys, especially those belonging to religious minorities.

For these people, fear, and I would even say terror, is ever-present, as is hunger and possibly the cold, because winter is coming; in addition, they constantly worry about the future, which must be terrible.

• (2110)

I appreciate the fact that Canada has donated money. It has donated \$28 million, including \$19 million to deal with this specific situation. Moreover, Canada's contribution will also help provide, among other things, psychological help, especially to victims of sexual violence. However, we must do more. The problem with this type of situation is that we cannot say that we have made a contribution and stop there. The crisis and everything the people are going through do not stop. We cannot give once and think that we are done.

The needs are still enormous. On September 5, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued the following statement:

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The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] urgently needs more financial support to be able to meet the needs of forcibly displaced people and host communities across Iraq. As part of the UN humanitarian relief effort, UNHCR will soon launch an appeal for US\$315 million to meet the needs of the internally displaced in Iraq. The main focus will be on providing life-saving protection services and assistance to respond to the most urgent basic needs of displaced Iraqis, including winterization support.

Once again, the subject of winter comes up. I would like to add a little note here, because I see that a small portion of the aid Canada is offering will go towards preparing for the winter and providing supplies accordingly. However, it is not very much. We need to do more, now. I have heard reports about various organizations in Syria that issued pleas for supplies for the winter. They issued their pleas at the end of the summer and did not get a response until the spring, when of course it was too late. I hope we can move more quickly this time.

In fact, Canada responded favourably to the NDP's requests to support refugees, combat sexual violence and ensure respect for international humanitarian law. We therefore expect the Canadian government to make additional commitments in those areas in the coming days.

I think we can all agree that we always need to ask for more to be done. There is no doubt that the current situation is very difficult. I have talked about the Central African Republic, South Sudan, the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the situation in Ukraine and in Syria, as well as the most recent conflicts in the Middle East. However, it is our moral duty to be there. Furthermore, Canada's contribution in the area of humanitarian aid—our trademark for many years—could help to improve our international reputation, which has unfortunately suffered greatly in recent years.

• (2115)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we were talking about tonight is the unpredictability of situations like this, and that is a given. We go somewhere with the intent to accomplish certain things at a certain time, but of course somebody else has a vote in that: the folks on the other side, whether it was the Taliban in Afghanistan or whether it is ISIS in this particular situation.

Does my colleague have an assessment, her assessment, of the ultimate intent of ISIS, of where they think they want to go? Does she have an assessment of that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I think it is fairly clear. They simply want to maintain their territory and expand it as much as possible, not only in violation of international law and human rights, but also, as we have often seen, in defiance of our dignity and human solidarity, in which I still believe.

The fundamental issue is to determine what kind of humanitarian aid Canada can provide to these 1.5 million persecuted and displaced people, including women, children and seniors.

In the wake of a disaster, we often write the victims' names on cenotaphs. In cases such as this, we would simply recite the names of all these people so that we do not forget that we are talking about a tally of 1.5 million people.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments and I agree with her that we need to increase our contribution for humanitarian aid to Iraq. This need is considerable and extremely urgent.

Would the New Democratic Party consider a non-combat military role for Canada in Iraq to help the other coalition members dislodge ISIS and to ensure that the people now in refugee camps can go back to their villages?

• (2120)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, once again, we should start by defining this role, by debating it and by voting on what Canada is proposing to do. We must have a real discussion with accurate information and transparency. We have seen in the past where a project lacking transparency, debate and discussion can lead us.

We in the NDP, unlike the Liberals, are not prepared to give the Conservatives a blank cheque on such issues as the free trade agreement with Europe or the issue being debated tonight. We want to see the details of the matter. We want to be able to discuss them and then vote.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly tonight's emergency debate is focusing on the fact that parliamentarians should have the opportunity not only to discuss, but also to vote on this issue. That is the real debate in the House. The government promised parliamentarians that it would give us that opportunity with respect to missions.

A request was made for humanitarian aid, including water, hygiene kits, shelter and other pressing needs. All of a sudden the government is sending in troops instead of humanitarian aid.

Does my colleague know whether there has been a direct request from the Iraqi government, the UN or anyone else, apart from President Obama, to send troops into Iraq?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

Indeed, that is all very vague. At the risk of repeating myself, the Liberals and Conservatives would love it if we took them at their word and gave them a blank cheque. However, everything is vague and we do not have all of the information.

Moreover, the information about the number of military personnel involved seems to change every few hours. It has been a bit of a nightmare. President Obama is able to give an exact number and explain, in detail, what the mission will consist of. I am somewhat surprised to see that the Canadian government is unable to do the same thing.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise this evening and privileged to follow the NDP member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. I truly respect her contribution to the House and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development because she brings to bear her experience as a diplomat around the world. We appreciate having her with us, and it is an honour to follow her this evening in this deeply important debate.

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I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie for taking the initiative to propose an emergency debate on Canada's response to the situation in Iraq. We can all agree that the situation must be addressed urgently.

It is always an honour to rise in the House to discuss a situation that demands our full attention. We do not often have the opportunity to discuss situations that are not only urgent, but also critical. That is why tonight's debate was given its title.

The situation in Iraq must command our attention as MPs, of course, but also as a country. We all agree that the violence employed by the Islamic State of Iraq is extremely horrible and shocking. It is totally reprehensible. That cannot be said too often. We have agreed almost unanimously that Canada should be involved in certain aspects of the situation.

As an aside, when it comes to Canada's role in the world, I would like to add that I have participated in processes at the international level for the past 23 years. I have participated in multilateral negotiations for the past 23 years to negotiate declarations, specifically. There was a time when Canada's reputation was the envy of countries around the world. I would even say that ours was a very enviable position. I can attest to the fact that, when Canada took a stand on a contentious issue during the debates and multilateral negotiations held by the United Nations, other countries listened. Our role is therefore to define our foreign policy. Over the past few years, we have lost the important role we used to play.

The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra just said that our reputation is undermining our role in the international arena, or something like that—I only quickly jotted down what she said. I think it is worse than that because it particularly undermines our credibility when we take leadership in the international arena. It undermines our credibility and, as a result, our influence on the world stage. How can we influence others in a critical situation if we no longer have credibility and have lost the reputation we once had? It is unfortunate that it has come to that.

• (2125)

The same challenges arise in all similar situations we have seen around the world virtually forever; these challenges are complex and difficult, on both a political and humanitarian level, as my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie just mentioned. I would add on a human rights level, too. Indeed, we are also currently dealing with human rights issues in Iraq.

Anyone who has listened to the debate so far will certainly know that these challenges are political because of the positions expressed by both sides. Some people are looking for answers before sending in the military, which is absolutely commendable. Anyone who takes a reasonable position in this case must know what they are getting into. No one has all the answers. I was elected to the House to make informed decisions, which is what I have tried to do all my life in the positions and roles I have held. When I negotiated agreements, my people always demanded informed responses before a decision was made in order to act accordingly. We do not have that opportunity right now. There is already a political problem.

Some members are looking for answers, while others want to move forward without providing these critical and fundamental

answers. Their allies in the House are saying that they do not have all the answers but that they will move forward anyway. Earlier, the Leader of the Opposition said that the NDP will not agree to proceed in this way. We cannot move forward with certain aspects of the proposal until we are fully informed. That is very important.

Despite the \$28 million that has already been allocated—and we commend the parliamentary secretary for that—there are still ongoing needs in several areas. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said:

[There is an urgent need for] more financial support to be able to meet the needs of forcibly displaced people and host communities across Iraq. As part of the UN humanitarian relief effort, UNHCR will soon launch an appeal for US\$315 million to meet the needs of the internally displaced in Iraq. The main focus will be on providing life-saving protection services and assistance to respond to the most urgent basic needs of displaced Iraqis, including winterization support.

We must commend our government for the funds that have already been allocated, but we also need to reassess the situation and meet the needs that were identified by the United Nations.

I would like to quickly come back to the role that Parliament must play in this situation and in the government's current proposal. Parliament has a critical role to play. We are elected officials and we are here to make decisions. They must be smart and informed decisions. What is more, Parliament must play a decision-making role when it comes to military interventions and deployments abroad. It seems as though we will not have that opportunity. We are being told not to worry and that everything will work out. We cannot accept such a proposal.

• (2130)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's remarks, and at one point he said our roles define our foreign policy. I would suggest my personal point of view that a lot of our roles have been more about going along to get along than actually taking a principled approach on certain issues.

Dante said that the darkest recesses of hell are reserved for those who try to remain neutral at a time of moral crisis. I have two questions. The first one is whether my colleague thinks we are at a time of moral crisis, and second, rather than our roles defining our foreign policy, does he not think that maybe our Canadian values should define our foreign policy and, by extension, the roles we play in any particular situation?

• (2135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for the question.

Of course, the political situation is critical, not only in Iraq, but also all over the world. Each country must address these situations in its foreign policy. These policies are being challenged, to put it mildly. There are currently some very difficult situations all over the world.

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However, since we are talking about Canadian values, I want to say that when I arrived here in Parliament, it was my understanding that one Canadian value was that Parliament had a role to play in these types of decisions. Parliament is the highest democratic institution in our country, and parliamentarians, who are elected by the Canadian public, must be allowed to vote on decisions related to military deployments. That is a Canadian value. That is what the member's leader promised—first in 2004, and against in 2005-06. He just broke his promise. I do not think that is a Canadian value.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we can agree that there is a huge need for humanitarian aid, and the government has, in fact, fallen short in terms of meeting the demand for that humanitarian aid.

I ask my colleague to my right to recognize the plight of the literally thousands of refugees who are in different camps and whose only desire is to stay in their homeland but be able to go back to their villages. If I may, I would ask him to put himself in a position of being in government and having to make a decision on having Canada play a non-combative role, because that is, in essence, what we are really talking about here. Does he feel there is any situation where Canada could be providing some form of assistance, but not combative? Are there situations where he would be in favour of that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is asking me how I would react if I were part of the government. I can assure my colleague that that I will be in 2015, and Canadians will confirm that quickly enough.

This is an urgent situation. Parliament has to make a fundamental decision, and we are being asked hypothetical questions. We do not have all the information. We are not well-informed. We cannot make an informed decision on this subject. What is worse, we are not even being given the democratic opportunity to vote on this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time this evening with the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

I am pleased to speak today on this pressing global issue, the complex human crisis in Iraq. I am particularly honoured to speak in this House on how Canada is joining its international partners to meet this complex challenge head-on.

Our engagement in Iraq incorporates a range of measures to tackle the various security, humanitarian, human rights and political aspects of the conflict.

With the time I have, I would like to speak on how our government is addressing these many faces of Iraq's conflict, using all of the military, development, civilian security and diplomatic tools at our disposal.

The Prime Minister, ministers of foreign affairs, defence and development, as well as others participating in today's debate have already clearly expressed through words and deeds the extent to which Iraq is a priority issue for our government.

The violence and hateful ideology promoted by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL as we know it, threaten the stability of the region, including the security of our friends and allies, like Jordan and Israel.

Spaces under the control of these insurgents can also become safe havens for groups and individuals who would do harm to Canada and our allies. At the same time, these groups are bringing untold misery to the people living under their influence. This is especially true of women, children and religious minorities.

As a result, the scope of the challenge is indeed daunting. The capacity, authority, inclusiveness and legitimacy of the Iraqi state must be restored. Victims of violence must be protected and returned to their homes.

Human rights and the rule of law must be defended and ultimately must prevail. The safety and security of Canadians, whether in the region or here at home, must be ensured.

The crisis in Iraq is a concern for the entire world. That is why many countries, including many of Canada's NATO allies, are coming together under a collective and collaborative effort to support the people of Iraq.

Just yesterday our colleague the Minister of Foreign Affairs met in Paris with more than 20 other world leaders intent on working together to combat the heinous actions of ISIL.

To quote our minister as to why Canada will join this coalition:

No country alone can tackle this problem. We must work together, to each of our strengths and abilities. We must stand together to extinguish this threat.

Canada's coalition partners are no less committed to this collective cause. On the margins of NATO's summit in Wales, 10 countries met to consider the international and comprehensive strategy to counter the threat from ISIL. Convened and chaired by the United States and the United Kingdom, the meeting included Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Turkey.

Participants talked about a range of options to thwart ISIL and agreed to meet in the coming weeks to coordinate ongoing actions to support security forces in this fight. NATO also agreed to facilitate among allies to ensure the efficient delivery of humanitarian and security assistance.

In addition, many of Canada's closest likeminded countries and partners are providing support in different ways. The United Kingdom and Australia have joined the effort of delivering weapons and ammunition to Iraqi security forces, while Albania has donated a large stockpile of its surplus weapons, many of which were transported into Iraq by our very own Royal Canadian Air Force planes.

For over a month, the United States has conducted air strikes against ISIL, against its positions, and has committed approximately 1,600 military personnel to advise Iraqi forces in the fight against the terrorist organization.

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In addition to its own direct military support, U.S. leadership and coordination is helping to galvanize support around a global coalition.

• (2140)

Of particular note, on September 7, Arab League foreign ministers made the welcome commitment to take all necessary measures to join Iraq and the international community in confronting ISIL and other militant groups, including stemming the flow of foreign fighters. Canada especially welcomes the engagement of key Arab partners in the region to encourage and support their involvement in defeating the threat posed by ISIL.

For its part, Canada is responding in line with the scope of the challenge. Some of our contributions, including our significant deployment of military advisers and sizable provision of humanitarian assistance, are being discussed in further depth by others here today. However, beyond these measures designed to address the most immediate security and humanitarian challenges, Canada is actively rolling out forward-looking initiatives that will help Iraqis make the eventual transition toward longer term recovery and sustainable peace.

Thus far, Canada has identified more than \$64 million in assistance for Iraq. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs has announced \$15 million in new security programming alone. This sizable contribution is being used to strengthen the capacity of security forces in Iraq by providing them with non-lethal assistance, including vehicles, computers, radios and personal protective equipment such as helmets and body armour. Canada is also using these funds to advance regional efforts aimed at limiting the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria.

Long-term stability in Iraq will depend upon the ability of all Iraq's diverse communities to share a common space in Iraqi society and political life, where human rights, pluralism and the rule of law are respected. Canada is already supporting dialogue between high-level leaders across Iraq's sectarian divides, to promote reconciliation and reduce violence, while at the same time working with local political institutions to enhance representation—for example, by bridging the gap between elected representatives and the public in Kurdistan.

Canada has consistently urged the formation of an inclusive, democratic, representative and federal Iraq. This is why Canada will support religious freedom projects to assist Iraq's persecuted religious communities. Canada has expressed its willingness to share any best practices and lessons learned from our federal model with Iraq and the KRG in case this should be helpful to settling their differences.

In addition to the political security dynamics of the crisis, Canada is committed to doing its fair share for Iraq's longer term recovery and development. The government is working quickly to establish an overall framework for Canadian development programming in Iraq over the next five years to build the economic and social foundations that are vital for a prosperous and stable future for the people of Iraq.

In the immediate term, Canada will also soon finance a series of initiatives in the areas of northern Iraq that are supporting large populations of internally displaced persons. We will work with

communities and municipalities that are struggling to maintain basic services as a result of increased demands, such as education, water supply and waste management.

The scale and scope of the challenges we are facing in Iraq are daunting. Nothing short of a concerted international effort is required to end the threat posed by ISIL and the deepening sectarian divide in Iraq. Our allies are taking up their share of the burden and through a comprehensive effort involving all the development, diplomacy and security tools at our disposal. Canada is doing the same. We do so not just because we wish to do right by the people of Iraq, but also because it is our responsibility to the people of Canada.

• (2145)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague across the way said the challenge is daunting, and it is. I think of children. Children are always disproportionately affected by displacement in armed conflict. I am deeply concerned about the critical humanitarian needs facing children and families affected by the conflict.

According to UN monitoring, up to 700 children have been killed or maimed in Iraq since the beginning of the year, including summary executions. ISIL has tasked boys as young as 13 years old to carry weapons, guard strategic locations, or arrest civilians. Other children are being used as suicide bombers.

The government is contributing \$28 million. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has said it is insufficient. I will ask the government this again tonight. Will it provide more for humanitarian aid? What more it will undertake to protect the most vulnerable, the children?

• (2150)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and also for the passion with which she delivered it. She always speaks so compassionately of the plight of children in difficult situations around the world, and indeed I think her question is very well placed tonight.

We all know that this is an extremely difficult situation in Iraq, very difficult for the people there. In a neighbouring country, in Syria, I had the opportunity to see the effect that war has had on the children there.

That is why our Minister of Foreign Affairs just visited Iraq with parliamentary colleagues from the other parties as well, certainly from the NDP and the Liberal Party. We wanted to show a united government to the Iraqi people and indeed, to the international community, because humanitarian aid is required there to help the children who are displaced from their homes, the families displaced from their homes. This will have a lasting effect on these children as they grow up. They will never forget this difficult time in their country.

We have committed humanitarian aid, particularly to assist those families. The minister is closely monitoring that. He is discussing it with our partners around the world, and will continue to do so. One thing is certain. Canada will be there for those who are most affected in Iraq.

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Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to note that this issue has been underlined by the government and others in the House as being absolutely critical. I just want to put on the record that it is unfortunate we did not have more senior members speak here tonight. If this is the most important issue facing our country as a foreign affairs issue, and I say that with respect to my colleague for actually participating and thank him for it, we would have also hoped to have seen more senior members of the government and even the other opposition parties.

On that note, it is really important that we see—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the leader. It would be nice to have the leader here to represent the Liberal Party.

If this is the clarity we need in terms of the debate of having—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is an experienced member of Parliament. He knows full well, making reference to someone's absence or presence is not parliamentary. We do not point out every time the leader of the official opposition is not here. I do not think it is appropriate for him to be impugning motives.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North is right. I will ask the hon. member for Ottawa Centre to be mindful of that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

We have asked for some clarity on the mission. We have also asked for some direct humanitarian response and the government has said it is willing to follow up on the four requests that we have made. However, does the hon. member not agree with me that something as important as sending our troops into harm's way, and everyone agrees that they are going into a theatre of conflict, should have a motion from government that we vote on to satisfy all Canadians, in particular, if I may, the Canadian Forces we are sending into theatre. After all, it is our decision to send them abroad. They will go where we tell them to go, but it is incumbent upon us to tell Canadians and those forces exactly what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what the exact mission is.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by responding to that question as follows.

First of all, on this side of the House, we do not look at people as juniors and seniors. Every member who is present in the House this evening, and any other evening or any other day, is representing well over 100,000 constituents, certainly in Ontario, and perhaps a little less than that in some other regions of the country. However, every member is important and every member is senior.

The fact that there are so many members here tonight is a testament to the conviction of the people who are elected by their respective constituents. I applaud everyone who is here participating in this important debate this evening.

In response to the question, the member knows very well that, I believe it was on September 5 of this year, the leaders of the opposition parties were briefed by the Minister of National Defence

on Canada's plans and how we were going to move forward. It was our hope, of course, that the leadership of the other parties would inform their members, engage them in discussion, and impart upon them the information that was discussed with the Minister of National Defence.

In addition, let me just say that I am a little surprised to hear the question from the hon. member, because I believe he was one of the people who was invited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to visit Iraq and see the impact there. I would hope that he would be very supportive of this effort as it is very much needed in Iraq.

This is not the time to play political partisan games. I believe it is time for us to behave and act as a responsible united government, parties all together.

● (2155)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to contribute to this important debate, even at the risk of disappointing my hon. friend from Ottawa Centre.

As we heard today, and during last week's meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, in addition to pledging \$28 million in humanitarian aid and \$15 million in security aid to Iraq since the beginning of 2014, and delivering critical military supplies donated by our allies to the Iraqi security forces, Canada has also initiated deployment of several dozen military advisers, 69 to be exact. These military advisers will be working alongside the U.S. military to provide strategic and tactical advice to Iraqi security forces as they battle the terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

I want to quote from a *Globe and Mail* article by an expert in these matters, Colonel (Retired) George Petrolekas. He said:

[The Islamic State] is the most savage strain of jihadism yet seen, publically reveling in its brutality and unapologetically killing anyone in its path. The danger of [the Islamic State] is that it is on the cusp of an inflection point, where a transition occurs from what we would call insurgent or terrorist activity to the trappings of a conventional force and state power with accompanying tactics which seek ground to conquer and people to govern.

At present, [the Islamic State] provides its own brutal form of governance in many cities it controls; it acts as a state, it moves as an army and has state revenues. The killing of hostages, dressed in orange prison garb is meant to convey something beyond what terror killings in the past have done—it does not seek to destabilize a state, it seeks to be a state.

If fully realized, [the Islamic State] will never simply be contained. If not destroyed, [the Islamic State] has the potential to dislocate an already volatile region, eventually embroiling Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and the wider Middle East—redrawing borders in its wake.

I agree with Colonel Petrolekas.

Dante said that the darkest recesses of hell are reserved for those who try and remain neutral in a time of moral crisis. I suggest we are there, at a time of moral crisis.

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I would like to take a few minutes to explore the unique skill set and experience that Canada's Armed Forces bring to the table in this difficult situation. In all of our military collaboration abroad Canada always strives to remain responsive to the needs of our partner nations on the ground. As we know, these can evolve rapidly. With the rise of new technologies, socio-economic realities and geopolitical trends, the threats we face have diversified and now involve cross-cutting issues such as transnational organized crime and terrorism.

To respond to these emerging threats, Canada draws on the wide variety of skills and resources found across the Canadian Armed Forces, offering tailored, targeted training, capacity building and mentorship in areas of particular need. One of these areas is special operations, and specifically, counter terrorism.

Beginning in 2008, Canada's Special Operations Forces Command, CANSOFCOM, expanded its international training and has now instructed over 1,300 personnel from Jamaica, Niger, Kenya, Mali and Afghanistan on different aspects of counter terrorism operations. These aspects range from intelligence, to planning, staff training, command, communications, battle skills and medical support.

Much of this collaboration has been conducted through the counter terrorism capacity building program, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. It is a whole-of-government initiative established in response to the UN Security Council's call for states to support each other in the fight against terrorism by providing training, funding, equipment and legal assistance.

Our special forces operators have shown just how much they bring to this interdepartmental and international counter terrorism effort. These soldiers are highly educated and professional. They possess incredible technical skills and they have been battle-tested in some of the most austere, dangerous environments in the world, including Afghanistan, where they worked closely with their U.S. counterparts to fight insurgents and protect allied forces during Operation Enduring Freedom. Then they went on to help train and mentor the Afghan National Army special forces.

However, their real value comes from their adaptability and responsiveness. These women and men know their basics inside out. Trained and equipped to operate in small teams, without large logistical chains, and to respond quickly to evolving needs, they are ideally suited to go into even the most unfamiliar and unstable areas and apply those basics to get the job done, and fast.

The high level of expertise, readiness and maturity our special operations forces have attained through their own work and training give them the very technical and diplomatic skills they need to support, advise and instruct developing militaries throughout the world. Their efforts have already paid off. In 2009, for example, a Jamaican counter terrorism unit, trained by Canada's Special Operations Regiment, successfully ended the hijacking of an aircraft with almost 200 Canadian passengers on board, overpowering the gunman without any shots fired.

● (2200)

Canada is a world leader when it comes to the provision of military training, capacity building and mentorship outside the NATO community, not only in the area of counterterrorism but right across the board. For 50 years, our military training and co-operation program, the MTCP, has helped deliver training to thousands of candidates from non-NATO countries. Its core programming, offered in Canada and abroad, includes language training, peace support and professional development and staff courses in a wide range of areas from communications to leadership, ethics and battle procedures. Its classes are geared toward the future leaders of tomorrow's armed forces, and its funding covers all regions of the world, including about 22% that goes to the Middle East and Africa. Last year alone, more than 1,400 candidates from 62 member nations received instruction through this program.

As Canadian co-chair of the Canada–U.S. Permanent Joint Board on Defence, I am very familiar with the excellent work in capability development that Canada has contributed to our smaller allies around the world. In addition to the MTCP, different organizations within DND and the Canadian Armed Forces occasionally conduct international training and capacity building at the request of partner nations and within their own areas of expertise, such as countering improvised explosive devices or maritime navigation.

Canada's international military-to-military training, capacity building and mentorship serve three broad goals, goals that are intimately connected to National Defence's mandate to protect Canada and Canadians while contributing to global peace and security.

First, our training co-operation generates enhanced interoperability and capability in partner countries. For example, our peace support training has increased the number of qualified troops available for deployment with the UN and other multilateral organizations.

Second, working closely with members of foreign militaries also helps to expand and solidify Canada's bilateral defence relationships by increasing mutual understanding and good will and laying the foundation for further collaboration. In fact, countries that have participated in Canada's MTCP have been shown to be more likely to co-operate with and offer the Canadian Armed Forces access to their countries and their forces. This has been evidenced by our successful co-operation with countries in the Caribbean in the areas of transnational crime and drug interdiction.

Finally, our international capacity building promotes Canada's democratic values such as rule of law, protection of human rights and civilian oversight of the military in areas of the world where such principles may still be under threat.

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Despite the clear success of our international training and capacity building to date, the question continues to be raised as to what relevant experience Canada can bring to this particular part of the world and this particular armed struggle. The Canadian Armed Forces have significant experience in hostile regions where armed insurgency is rife. Afghanistan of course provides a telling example. For more than 12 years, 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members worked with international partners to create the conditions for peace and security in that country by rooting out insurgents and training the Afghan National Security Forces. I had the privilege of spending some time with our forces in Afghanistan, including our special ops forces on several occasions. Their professionalism was manifest, and I was always impressed with their commitment to their mission on behalf of Canadians. I was especially impressed with the largely unsung and extremely difficult work of our special forces and left with the thought that I am very glad that they are on our side.

However, our men and women in uniform have also participated in stabilization, observer and capacity-building missions in Iraq, Kuwait, Sudan, the Golan Heights and other parts of the Maghreb and Middle East. They have taken part in multinational operations to counter illicit trafficking and terrorism in the Mediterranean and Arabian seas, while helping to protect civilians in Libya during the recent upheaval there. Across the Middle East and North Africa, the Canadian Armed Forces have worked closely with allies and partners in international coalitions like the one currently supporting Iraqi forces as they battle ISIS, coalitions that demand a high degree of interoperability and collaboration, both between militaries and between military and civilian organizations. This experience will allow our military advisers to successfully mentor Iraqi security forces, which in certain cases are unprepared for full-scale modern warfare and are unused to collaborating with conventional forces.

Canadians should have no doubt that our military personnel on deployment in Iraq have a huge amount to offer. They will be able to make a positive contribution, and their deployment represents an immediate and significant step this government is taking to turn back ISIS's devastating advance through which thousands of innocent victims have already been killed and millions displaced. Their important work will help counter the threat this expansionist terror group poses to regional and global security, and will ensure the security of Canada and all Canadians.

● (2205)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his contribution to the debate tonight. It was a well-written and well-read speech.

I know the member has had considerable military experience. We are happy to see that and we thank him for his contribution as a fighter pilot, a lieutenant colonel in the air force and serving on the defence committee and the joint board. I agree with him about the capability of our military, in particular our special operations forces.

I do have one question for the member. Being an experienced military person, he would also know that one of the areas that has been historically rife for what we are calling mission creep has been this whole notion of military advisers being sent in as an advance team, such as in the Vietnam War, the 3,000 or 4,000 sent in by President Kennedy leading to the Vietnam War. It is one thing to be training people, such as in Jamaica with the Canadian Joint Incident

Response Unit training others to do that. That is a valid and useful thing to be doing, and we can do it in many parts of the world, as well as police forces. However, we already have an example, and we are not even a week past President Obama's announcement of the Americans, through the president or the chairman or the joint chiefs of staff, talking about turning his advisers into assault troops along with Iraqi forces. Is this not really part of the slippery slope that Canadians are—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there to accommodate as many questions and comments as I can.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, what General Dempsey does in the United States is up to General Dempsey. What President Obama does with the American forces is up to President Obama.

The simple fact is that we have some very capable members of the Canadian Forces, as the member rightly acknowledged. As Dante said, I believe we have an obligation to act in a moment of moral crisis.

The other point I mentioned earlier in a question to another colleague is that we are not the only ones who have a vote in this. ISIS has a big vote, just as the Taliban had a big vote in Afghanistan.

The member comments that we should have had a vote here. The opposition had all day to do an opposition day motion and have a vote. Therefore, the member should not whine to me tonight that we did not have a vote when they had all day to get that done.

With respect to his question about mission creep or whatever, we are there for a purpose with a specific number of people for a specific length of time. What happens after that, I wish I knew. The simple fact is that we do not control these things. We do not control world events. We react to them. We react to them in the interests of Canada, in the interests of our allies and in the interests of common sense and common decency.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the government that there are no junior or senior members here. Therefore, I know the member for Edmonton Centre will answer my question.

If we are to take on ISIS to try to defeat it, we must do it on both fronts, not only in Iraq but also in Canada. Apparently, about 130 Canadians have gone over to the region. Some of them have come back and they have been radicalized. The government has said that if people are accused of and found guilty of terrorism they could lose their citizenship, if they are dual nationals.

I want to ask my colleague what happens if one is just simply a Canadian and is found guilty of terrorism. What would be the consequences in that case?

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Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. It is a simple question and I have a simple answer. They would go to jail and would stay there for the rest of their lives.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most difficult issues we have ever faced in Parliament since I have been elected. I hold town hall meetings, and I have heard from more than 1,000 members of my constituency in town hall meetings who have all raised the question of what we do about ISIS. They are horrified by the brutal beheadings, but neither are they sure that this is a simple issue where sending military efforts and advisers to Iraq will make the difference that is required.

We know that the beheadings of innocent people are an affront to the religion of Islam, that they offend the prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. They know that this is not an exemplification of religion but an extremist, appalling, unforgivable, inexcusable act of merciless, ruthless and inhumane extremism.

With a military presence as small as Canada proposes and has committed to send, do we have any analysis that this is the best thing we could do? Are there humanitarian efforts that would be more successful?

We know that Iraq asked for humanitarian assistance with Liberal, NDP and Conservative members of Parliament. The Green Party was not included in that discussion. We know they were asked for humanitarian assistance. What more can we do that would blunt the attraction of this kind of extremism? It is pernicious and it is evil, but I am not convinced that what we propose to do will end this threat.

• (2210)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I agree with everything my colleague said. The fact is that this is what the 30 days is about. It is about going over there to assess, to advise the Iraqis, to give them assistance and to hopefully point them in a long-term productive direction.

We are not there by ourselves. We are only sending 69 for a month, but there are a lot of other countries involved. As I said earlier, we do not get the only vote here. ISIS gets to vote. For sure they want humanitarian assistance. When the Yazidis came down from the mountain, they were not looking for tents; they were looking for rescue.

The world collectively has to provide a robust response to ISIS. The role Canada is playing now is the one we have set out to play, and the 30 days will determine what may or may not come next.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to join with my colleagues in this very important debate we are having in the House tonight on Canada's response to the situation currently raging in Iraq.

Before I begin, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

The debate in the House this evening is of the utmost importance because the situation that the people of Iraq are currently facing is frankly intolerable. That has been mentioned by members of all parties in the House this evening. The terrorist organization known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has committed acts of

violence that are absolutely disgusting. Civilian populations are being massacred. Civilians are the targets of extremist strikes. There is sexual violence against women, children and members of Iraq's minority communities. Many thousands of Iraqi citizens have had to flee their homes in the face of the escalation of the violence currently raging in their country.

Each of us in the House agrees on one fact. ISIL represents a humanitarian and security threat and the acts currently being committed in Iraq are likely to destabilize the region. The intensity and the nature of the acts of violence are a direct attack on human rights and the freedoms of religion, belief and association. As well, the humanitarian aid needs in Iraq are staggering. Indeed that was the government of Iraq's request to Canada. The first thing the country needs at the moment is rapid humanitarian aid for the thousands, the millions, of displaced civilians who need material support and other kinds of assistance right away.

All parties agree on those elements. Where we disagree—and this is the crux of tonight's debate—is on the Conservative government's unilateral decision to send Canadian troops to Iraq with no consultation with Parliament or even a vote here in the House. I heard people say that our party had an entire opposition day to discuss the issue and force a vote in Parliament. Beyond that, the government has completely neglected part of its responsibility here. It was the government's obligation to consult members of all parties. Each of us represents Canadians who are concerned by the current situation in Iraq. They are wondering what will be the role assigned to the Canadian troops on the ground. People still remember what happened in Afghanistan. It is very fresh in their memories.

I represent the riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, which is home to the Valcartier military base. Many of the soldiers from that base were deployed to Afghanistan. Some never made it home, while others came back with physical or psychological injuries that they still have today. Soldiers and their families want details. They want to know what the Canadian government is sending them into, and the place for such a debate is here in the House of Commons, not behind closed doors with a just a few cabinet ministers. We are told that the information was sent to the Leader of the Opposition who was supposed to share it with his MPs. That is not a debate; that is not consulting Parliament; that is simply getting second-hand information. The government only tells us what it wants to tell us, and then it expects that that information will be shared among the members, and we are supposed to believe we were consulted. That is not at all the kind of work the people of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier sent me to the House of Commons to do.

Once again, the government made a unilateral decision that further undermines the democratic principles that are the very foundation of our country. I heard the Conservatives talking about the importance of sending Canadian troops to spread Canadian values abroad. The current Conservative government is completely incapable of living those values in the day to day. Thus, every day, we see many abuses of the democratic principles that are supposed to be the foundation of our society. Personally, I find it a little hypocritical to hear the Conservatives saying they want to send our soldiers to spread Canadian values and principles, when they themselves are not capable of respecting them.

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This is not the first time the Prime Minister has broken his promise to consult Parliament before sending Canadian soldiers overseas. When the Conservatives were still campaigning in 2005-06, the Prime Minister campaigned on a promise to ask for Parliament's consent before deploying Canadian troops. It is written in black and white in the Conservative Party election platform at the time. It was an election promise, so it is easy to say that it was just rhetoric.

● (2215)

When he was elected in August 2009, the Prime Minister also stated unequivocally that his government would henceforth demand that any military deployment be supported by the Parliament of Canada. However, this is at least the second time that he has done otherwise.

During the mission in Libya, we saw that the government broke this promise, and now, for the mission in Iraq it is simply forgetting its promise. The government claims that the issue is more critical, that it has a majority and it does not need to consult with the other members of Parliament.

In my view, this is a direct affront to democracy. As an elected representative, am I supposed to read in the papers that the government has decided to send troops to Iraq, including possibly some of my constituents, while I have absolutely no information about where the troops will come from or what their role will be?

On September 9, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade held a special meeting to provide some clarifications. What a surprise. Once again, the Minister of National Defence was unable to answer the questions of the members of the opposition.

Fortunately, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was there and was able to answer some questions. However, the Minister of National Defence was completely lost. He had no details at all and was unable to do his job in the committee and inform the members.

Technically, the purpose of tonight's debate was also supposedly to provide more details to MPs on the current mission in Iraq. However, once again, the government was generous with its rhetoric and obscurantism, but shared no answers. We have many questions, but we still do not know how many troops will be deployed in total. For now, the government is saying 69. The numbers are somewhat vague. We have no concrete idea.

What will they do exactly to advise and help the Kurdish forces? We still have no idea. What is the mandate and objective of this mission for Canada? We still have no idea.

Unfortunately, we are completely missing the point of tonight's debate because we are still in the same spot. We hear the young people talk about key principles, Canadian values and the advisory role that our troops could play. However, other than that, I still have no concrete information to help me take a stand as an MP, which is what the NDP is asking.

I heard people from different sides of the House ask the NDP members what their position would be. First, we need the details; we need to know what is the mission and what are the objectives. There

are a multitude of questions to be answered and, for the time being, the information is sorely lacking.

In addition, we are being told that the Conservative government is reserving the right to re-evaluate the mission in 30 days and to determine what it will do next—once again without involving Parliament and MPs.

A little earlier, my Conservative colleague from Yukon said something interesting. He told us just how important it was to arrive at a consensus in the House and to have all parties support a common position. I would really like to know how we can do that if the opposition members do not have a say in debate.

How can my colleague from Yukon think we can achieve consensus and make a decision in the House when the contribution of opposition members is completely ignored by presenting them with a *fait accompli* and telling them that it is up to their leader to inform them of decisions made by the government? That makes absolutely no sense.

I have not abdicated my responsibilities as an MP. The citizens of my riding, Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, expect me to take part in the debate and to represent the civilians and the soldiers who live in my riding because they could be directly involved in this mission. However, no one has more information. We have nothing.

We must remember our soldiers' return from Afghanistan before we possibly engage in a mission that could go on forever and about which we know very little. I heard some of my colleagues talk about mission creep. We are currently facing that situation.

I find it deplorable that no vote is being held in Parliament. It is not the opposition's responsibility to devote an opposition day to this issue. The government promised to consult Parliament before deploying the military and they have broken that promise.

It is the Conservative government, not the opposition, that is responsible for this state of affairs.

● (2220)

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, and I were in Iraq. We visited three camps just three or four days before the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the opposition members arrived. We heard from people in the camps that first of all, they very much appreciated that their needs were being provided for so they could continue to survive. They were very thankful for that and thankful to the Kurds in the area.

Second, through interpreters, about 80% wanted to return home. Well, if they are going to return home, ISIL has to be defeated or removed from the area.

Here we are today listening to debate from the member opposite about some picky little things to do with what is happening here in our Parliament, when what these people want is to ensure that as winter comes on they can survive and carry on with their lives in the camps, and more importantly, can return home sometime. I have not heard an awful lot of debate from the member opposite on that particular issue.

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What Canada is doing is providing heavy lift to lift weapons in and an advisory capacity from our military, which is exactly what is needed to help defeat ISIL.

I would like to ask the member opposite why she is not speaking on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

In fact, all of the points he brought up could have been questions raised during a debate in Parliament before a vote on this mission. The points he raised are closely tied to the humanitarian aid that the NDP and the Iraqi government have been calling for. Those aspects were discussed a great deal by my colleagues during previous debates.

What my colleague is trying to do—and we see this all the time with the Conservative government—is obscure the facts and downplay the importance of debate in the House. The fact that the government has a majority does not negate its responsibility to work with other members and bring these issues before Parliament so that we can vote on them and speak to them. The NDP has already called for humanitarian aid. Statements and comments to that effect were made in committee on September 9. My colleagues made the request multiple times.

What I am not hearing from the Conservative members is any objection to the fact that their Prime Minister broke a promise that he made to Canadians in 2009. That is what I would like to debate. If we want to be able to have confidence in this government to conduct foreign operations, we first need to be able to have confidence that it can manage things on home soil.

• (2225)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, listening to the NDP members, I have the impression that they do not want the military to get involved, but they do not want to admit it. They are looking for all kinds of excuses not to answer this question.

I have a hypothetical question. Several NDP members said that they would be forming the government next year. I have the impression that the Islamic State will still be around. In the unlikely but hypothetical event that the NDP forms the government next year, would there be no question of military involvement to try to help the other members of the coalition do away with this scourge that is the Islamic State?

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I can assure my Liberal colleague that as the government, we would never make a unilateral decision like this. We would bring the issue before the House of Commons for debate, which is what should happen, and we would hold a debate among all the parties, which is appropriate, to try and come to the best solution possible.

I am hearing these comments coming from the Liberal Party, which has a tendency to throw its support behind the government and then ask for details. We saw it with the free trade agreement with the European Union, and we are seeing it again with the current situation in Iraq. The Liberals say that it is an excellent idea and they

give the government their support, but once they have said yes, then they ask for details and want to be in the know.

The NDP believes that we should have that information beforehand, that we should debate first and then vote, which is what happens in any good parliamentary democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise to speak tonight, but I regret that this is an emergency debate, a debate that will not be followed by a vote.

For those members on the other side who are saying we wasted our opposition day today on a topic they do not think is important, I was pleased to speak earlier on the importance of a higher federal minimum wage for more than 100,000 Canadians who go to work every day and do not earn enough to support their families.

As a representative of a riding with a large military component, I know that the Canadian Forces are ready to serve whenever they are asked, no matter how difficult the situation. Our responsibility as elected representatives is to set clear directions for any mission we are sending the Canadian Forces on so that they can properly prepare and so they know what they are expected to do when they get there.

Like my colleagues in the NDP, I am concerned not just about this debate, even though an hon. member calls having a debate in the House of Commons trivial. I am concerned that the nature of this mission and its goals are not clear.

I have heard many good ideas on the other side. Perhaps we should be confronting ISIS. Perhaps we should be protecting minorities. Perhaps we should do this. Perhaps we should do that. What is it we are actually asking the Canadian Forces to do? That is the question we think ought to be clearly answered by the government before the troops leave.

I am also concerned about mission creep, where one commitment leads to something quite different. My concern about this lack of direction or lack of clarity and mission creep is based on my own personal experience in Afghanistan in 2002. I want to talk about this for just a minute, because I think it is an important precedent for what we see happening now.

In 2002, I spent four months working for Amnesty International as a human rights observer and investigator in between the first two Canadian missions in Afghanistan. Nothing I am about to say should be interpreted as criticism either of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan or of the way the Canadian Forces carried out their duties in Afghanistan.

What I want to say is that our commitment in Afghanistan began as one sort of mission, anti-terrorism in the wake of 9/11, switched to another mission, rebuilding democracy and infrastructure, then became a hybrid mission of combat and reconstruction at the same time, and finally became a training and reconstruction mission.

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What began as a very small mission with, in that case, a clear purpose became something quite different as we stretched our involvement over a decade. It is useful to walk ourselves through those shifts as a kind of cautionary tale when the Conservatives are in the process of committing Canadian troops in Iraq.

There is actually an eery parallel with the Prime Minister confirming today that he sent 69 special forces troops to Iraq based on a request from the United States. In December 2001, a different Prime Minister, from a different party, sent 40 members of the JTF2 special forces unit to Afghanistan, also without a vote in Parliament, without a debate in Parliament, and also on a request from the United States. That mission suddenly expanded just a few weeks later when 750 combat troops arrived in Kandahar from Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Then, in May 2002, the Liberal government announced that the withdrawal of Canadian troops had been set for August 2002. Those troops left just about the time I arrived in Afghanistan. We had already had a very narrow special forces mission that expanded into a large combat mission that was then shut down. All of this happened within a few months.

I was fortunate, as part of my job, to travel throughout Afghanistan. Amnesty International does not use armed body guards, so we were very close to the people and what was happening there. I saw very clearly the need for international assistance in rebuilding both civil society and government institutions and in rebuilding the physical infrastructure of Afghanistan after the debacle of Taliban rule.

In February 2003, when I arrived back in Canada, I was among those who supported Canada's commitment to an ISAF mission that was focused on reconstruction. Initially Canada sent 1,000 troops in early 2003 and added another 1,800 by July. This mission, called Operation ATHENA, was to last two years and was to provide assistance with civilian infrastructure and with rebuilding the democratic process. We had a clear statement, but a different statement than the original missions in Afghanistan.

That mission ended in December 2005, though no one would really argue that much had been done other than start that process of rebuilding both democratic processes and the civil society infrastructure necessary for democracy to prosper.

• (2230)

When Canadians realized that the government was considering some new extension of the mission, the NDP leader at that time, Jack Layton, and the current Prime Minister, as leader of the opposition, jointly demanded that we have a debate and vote in Parliament before any new commitment was made to some different expanded mission in Afghanistan. Of course, without debate and without a vote, in February 2006 the Liberal government committed Canadian troops to a re-engagement in Afghanistan, this time in the south, in Kandahar, a very difficult region, and once again for two years. However, this time, we joined the U.S. war against the Taliban and terrorism in what was called the Regional Command South. It was not a UN mission. It was not a NATO mission at that time. It was simply a request to go to the assistance of the Americans. A Canadian general actually assumed command of Regional Command South, and it was not until July of that year that the NATO-led

mission of ISAF actually took control of that operation in southern Afghanistan.

The mission became a hybrid mission of fighting terrorism and doing reconstruction at the same time, something many of the civil society organizations in Afghanistan and international aid organizations heavily criticized, saying that it not only placed aid workers at risk but placed civil society members in Afghanistan at risk, because it connected reconstruction to the fight against terrorism. Had there been some kind of public debate before this recommitment was made at that time, those concerns could have been raised and I think could have been addressed. Certainly they would have been raised and might have been addressed.

To try to draw this parallel with Afghanistan to a close, Canada then stayed on in a combat role until 2010, and then from 2010 to 2014 played a non-combat advisory role until the final flag was lowered on March 12, 2014. More than a decade after the first small group of Canadian special forces arrived in Afghanistan, we had seen the deaths of 158 Canadians. More than 2,000 had serious physical injuries and many more were suffering the effects of PTSD. We also saw the death of one diplomat, three civilian aid workers, and one journalist. The parliamentary budget officer estimated the financial cost until the end of 2011 only at \$18.5 billion.

I raise these questions tonight because the commitment in Afghanistan started exactly the same way we are seeing things start in Iraq, and I wonder whether we have learned the lesson that we need to consider this very carefully before we get engaged in an unclear mission in an area where the conflict is sure to last at least another 10 years. I raise these questions, again, not to argue that Canada should not have gone to Afghanistan and not to argue about whether any particular strategy there was right or not. That can be left to historians at this point, but I raise them to demonstrate where ill-considered commitments with unclear goals can lead us and also to remind us all that this is a serious step the government is now taking.

I am honestly disappointed that Parliament is not being allowed to have a say in this mission and a vote in the House. I am disappointed, given the commitments made by the Prime Minister when he was leader of the opposition, not once or twice but repeatedly, that no troops would be committed abroad without a debate and vote in Parliament. Parliament would have a say. I do not believe that in a democracy we should ever say, as I have heard from the other side, that having a debate and vote in Parliament is trivial.

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I am also disappointed with the position taken by the Liberals tonight. When they jumped in front calling for this emergency debate, I thought they had had a change of heart from their days in government. I thought they would now be joining us in calling for a clear mission statement from the government, followed by a vote in the House, but I am afraid that what we are seeing tonight is the same thing we have seen with some of the trade deals, where the Liberals are quick to climb on board with the government and to ask for details later.

The only specific thing I heard tonight from Liberals was a demand to be fully briefed and to be informed of any future change in the mission. I assert as a parliamentarian and a representative of my riding that we have much larger responsibilities and much greater rights than just to be told what the government is doing. I know that fits well with the government's interpretation of what a government does when it has a majority, but there was a very powerful speech by the Leader of the Opposition on the contempt being shown to the House at this time.

• (2235)

In conclusion, as the member for Ottawa Centre has reminded us, the assessment mission, which consisted of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the member for Ottawa Centre, and the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, heard a clear request for humanitarian assistance. They did not hear a request for military assistance.

Again, we know that the things that have happened in terms of the actions of ISIS are quite evil, and no one here makes any excuses for them.

The last thing I have to say is that I cannot support sending Canadian forces to Iraq on some ill-defined mission, and I cannot understand why the Conservatives selected this mission over the humanitarian assistance that is so desperately needed.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's comments here and in the lobby. At the risk of complimenting the Liberals, I would point out that our two parties are the only ones that have actually been forced to face the realities in the world and actually do something about it in terms of Canada.

I would challenge my colleague a little on his statement that they were not allowed to debate, and so on. They chose all day to debate the minimum wage in Canada instead of taking their opposition day and debating the very thing they said they wanted to debate. Why did we not do this before? We would have had a vote.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the hon. member for Edmonton Centre and for his service to the country. He and I have always had a great relationship, and I feel that this is kind of a softball question. How in the world could we have scheduled a debate on what the government intends to do in Iraq? How would we put forward a motion about what the government intends to do in Iraq? That is exactly our point. We have not heard from you something we could actually vote on.

It would have been very difficult for us to do that as an opposition day motion when we do not know what you intend to do—

The Speaker: I was actually trying to remind the hon. member to avoid using the second person but to use the third person when we engage in questions and comments.

We will go on to the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to come back to the same question. The NDP has been talking nonstop about the need to have a vote. It seems to me that New Democrats want to have their cake and eat it too. Today they had the choice. They had an opposition day with the possibility of it entailing a vote, yet they chose to talk about the minimum wage, which is an important subject, but in terms of timeliness, it certainly does not compare to what we are talking about right now in terms of the urgency of it. They have made the point repeatedly themselves.

Why did the NDP not use this opportunity today to force a vote on this issue?

• (2240)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie that it is the government's responsibility to present its program in the House of Commons. It is not the official opposition's responsibility to present its program. The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie is the one who called for this emergency debate, and I assume—

Mr. Marc Garneau: It is all I could do.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I am glad he did. I am glad that we had the opportunity to stand here and talk about this as much as we have, but it does not substitute for the government taking up its responsibilities to provide, not just us in the House but Canadians, with a clear picture of what we are committing Canada to, in this case in Iraq.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this back to who is affected. My colleague did a very good job of outlining the concerns we have and gave the example of what happened in Afghanistan and why it is important to clearly delineate what we are doing and how we can help.

I would like to know why he thinks it is so important for us as a country to immediately respond to what I heard personally, along with my colleague from the Liberal Party and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to help those minorities that are right now needing basic needs met. We need to be supporting them as well as the huge number of people who still do not have their basic needs met, in places like Duhak, for water, sewage, and basic housing. Should that not be the first priority we have in front of us and the first priority that should be met before we talk about missions that are ill-defined?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I am going to refer back to another piece of my own experience. I was in East Timor at the time of the vote on independence, and the Indonesian military reacted with extreme violence. There were 1,500 people killed. The entire infrastructure of the country was destroyed. What Canada did then was send the Canadian Forces immediately to help rebuild housing, rebuild water systems, and meet those immediate needs. The need there was not to intervene militarily between Indonesia and the newly independent East Timor. It is an example of where we were very effective in meeting the real needs.

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I guess I would like to see perhaps a good justification for the military mission and for actually providing more military materials that will contribute to the conflict. We certainly know that the need for humanitarian assistance is great.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot say I am pleased to rise in debate on this matter, but I am moved to do so given my own personal long-standing connection with many of the minority communities in Iraq that are now facing what can only, in my view, be described as a genocide by a form of unbridled evil being manifested Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant by the so-called in Iraq and Syria.

I find it peculiar that in this debate there has been such an obsession over process in this place and so little discussion about the nature of the evil that the civilized world seeks to confront and diminish in the Middle East, an evil that is claiming the lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilians.

Let me offer some reflections on what I mean because in our post-modern cynical world of moral relativism and sometimes to speak in the stark moral language of categories such as evil is considered politically incorrect. I recall just yesterday a member of Parliament suggesting that those involved in beheading innocent civilians had sweetness and light in them, which is merely unrecognized by us.

We need to speak plainly when we see evil being manifest as we do through the spread of violent terror through this organization that is combining a kind of apocalyptic theology, a kind of extreme distortion of the Islamic doctrine of armed jihad with the political efforts to reconstitute a caliphate. Essentially this is an eighth century political religious ideology which this organization is seeking to impose through literally the violence of the sword on innocent human beings.

In March 2013, I visited Baghdad in order to attend the installation of the new patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, the major Christian denomination of Iraq, the ancient Christian Aramaic people who have been present there in Mesopotamia for over 1,800 years and who are in the words of today's political parox indigenous people who were, quite frankly, there long before there was the presence of Islam in Iraq. I was the first Canadian minister there in 34 years.

I will be splitting my time, Mr. Speaker, with the hon. member for Don Valley West.

I was in Baghdad on behalf of Canadians to express our solidarity with the Christian minority community of Iraq and with the other minority confessions whose leaders I met. I was there for the installation of His Beatitude Archbishop Louis Sako.

Last month when I was in the Middle East I spoke by phone with Patriarch Sako. He had just returned to Baghdad from Erbil where he had been greeting the displaced persons fleeing the Islamic State monsters who had just cleared them from their ancient homes in Mosul and Karakush along the Nineveh Plain, their ancient ancestral indigenous homeland.

We have all heard the stories about when Da'esh, also known as the Islamic state, arrived in Mosul, they issued a fatwa to all so-called infidels, also called non-believers, that they were to convert to

Islam within three days or be executed or become dhimmis, essentially to become de facto slaves.

● (2245)

He told me that all of the Christians of Mosul consequently rushed to flee the city. He was very disturbed, I must say, that even some long-time neighbours of these families who had lived side by side for generations, told Da'esh where many of the Christian families were. He said that the Christian families fled, and on their way out of Mosul, the so-called soldiers of Da'esh confiscated all of their worldly belongings, their jewellery, their suitcases, their cars, even their shoes, to go out into the desert in the Nineveh Plains barefooted.

However, Patriarch Sako told me that was not the end of the story, because he said that there were certain elderly, infirm Christians left in their hospital beds who had no family and who could physically not leave. This is a dimension of the story that I gather has not received media coverage, but he told me that these members of Da'esh, of the Islamic state, went into these hospitals and threatened these infirm, elderly Christians with execution through beheading in their hospital beds, or conversion. This is the nature of the evil that we are discussing tonight.

To give one other example, Adeba Shaker is a 14-year-old Yazidi girl from the same region of Iraq, and she recalls how the militants arrived in her village and separated old women from the rest of the group, then they took the children. Young women and girls faced terrifying fates. Some girls were raped by the commander, who had the privilege of taking their virginity, before being passed around among the fighters. After the prepubescent girls had been gang raped, they were sold off to the highest bidder. Women and girls were auctioned for as little as \$10, according to numerous reports. Others, like Adeba Shaker, were to be married off to the militants.

As we speak, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of girls who are facing serial gang rape in this circumstance in Iraq. Children have been beheaded. Thousands of people have been massacred for no crime other than their faith as Shias, as Yazidis, as Sufis, as Christians and others.

This place and so many of the politicians here speak in high-minded terms about the responsibility to protect, a notion that we had the United Nations recognize. I submit that if the responsibility to protect means anything, if our moral obligation to defend human dignity means anything, it must mean that we act in this instance.

I am proud that Canada has done so. We have done so through the substantial contribution of humanitarian aid, \$28 million, through \$15 million in support for Operation Impact, through the provision of heavy-lift aircraft to bring armaments from Yugoslavia and elsewhere in Europe to the Kurdish regions of Iraq so the Peshmerga militia can defend, yes, the Kurds, but other minorities from the fate similar to that which befell these infirm Christians in their hospital beds in Mosul and these little girls from the Yazidi community.

Canada, yes, has also decided to provide logistical training and advice to Kurdish forces at the invitation of the sovereign government of Iraq and the Kurdish regional authority to provide them with the experience that we have gained and the advice that they can use to defend innocent civilians from such a fate.

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I am proud to say that as the immigration minister in 2009, I launched Canada's largest refugee resettlement program since that of the Indo-Chinese Vietnamese boat people in 1979 for Iraqi refugees who had fled similar sectarian violence and terrorism in recent years.

• (2250)

I am pleased to inform the House that we have received, welcomed and protected some 18,200 Iraqi refugees and we will continue to protect more. Through our practical logistical support, humanitarian assistance, our refugee resettlement, the visit of our Minister of Foreign Affairs and our political support, I am pleased to say that Canada is doing what we can within our limited means and ability to protect these people and to give real practical expression to this notion of the responsibility to protect.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would point the minister to my comments just to underline his concern about the actual people to whom we need to respond.

I met some of the religious leaders whom he has referred to and they were adamant that we do one thing. In fact, our ambassador said the same thing. That was to immediately increase and support protection for minorities. I have to underline this, and it is really important for the minister to know. They told us that they did not want to leave their country. I think he would agree that we do not want them to leave either because that is the agenda of ISIS. It wants to empty these minority groups who have been there for thousands of years: the Mandaeans, the Yazidis and the Christians.

We have a concern around process. I think he would agree that is important in our democracy. However, my speech and certainly my passion for this is to protect the people from whom we heard. I would hope that he will push our Minister of Foreign Affairs to do what I have asked for, and they have agreed to do: protection of minorities not leaving their country and to immediately build housing for them. They cannot go back to Mosul because of what he just mentioned. Their neighbours have already informed on them. They have told us that they cannot go back.

Where is the commitment that his government said it would provide to ensure that the very people we both talked to will be safe and secure and get the support they need?

• (2255)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as I and all of my colleagues have underscored, this government has been the seventh-largest financial contributor to humanitarian assistance. We are one of the only countries that is providing logistical support to bring arms in to support the Peshmerga military.

The member asks what we are doing to protect the minorities. With respect, we do not protect innocent civilians from these minority communities hiding behind Kurdish lines from the Islamic State militants through pleasant speeches. We do not protect them with tents and humanitarian supplies. There is only one way we can protect them, and that is through the defensive use of force.

That is precisely why we are providing the heavy airlift capacity to arm the Peshmerga, so they can defend those minorities and those innocent civilians. That is precisely why 69 brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces are providing tactical advice to the

Kurdish militias, so they can protect those people that is precisely what we are doing.

I would invite the New Democratic Party to stand by its humanitarian values in supporting the protection of these people in the only practical way that matters, which is by assisting the military forces on the ground to protect them.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was not asked to participate in the multi-party mission in which the hon. member for Ottawa Centre participated. However, my understanding is that we were asked specifically for humanitarian assistance.

Could the government share with all of us in the House what analysis went into deciding that 69 advisers to a military mission was the best and most strategic way that our country could contribute to defeating ISIS? Are there not other means, and are they not potentially mutually inclusive rather than exclusive? Why are we not doing more to ensure that the voice of true Islam is heard in the region?

Could we not assist in reprogramming those who fall into the misunderstanding of religion, falling into an extremist, in fact a distortion of the worst sort, of the religion that is known as "Islam" by allowing people to believe they are experiencing or living up to or exemplifying a religion when they are in fact representing the worst distortion and bastardization of a true religion by executing innocent people through beheading? This is appalling. These people are cowards. Could we not harness more in the way to take on in even social media what it is that is attracting people to this wrong-headed version of what it is to be Islamic?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the 69 military advisers that we have provided to assist Kurdish militia are not the only way in which Canada is seeking to protect the vulnerable minorities of that country by any means. There is humanitarian support. There are projects delivered through our Office of Religious Freedom to promote pluralism more generally in Iraq. There are military armaments that we are bringing into the region to support the Kurdish militias. There are political and diplomatic efforts.

I could get into a very interesting conversation with the hon. member about the theological root causes of this crisis and about the hundreds of madrasas spreading the doctrine of armed jihad, not just in Iraq and Syria but from Nigeria to the southern Philippines. That would be a very interesting subject.

However, if an Islamic State fighter is coming after the 12-year-old daughter of a Yazidi or Christian mom or dad, those parents do not have time for a debate on root causes. They do not have time for rebuttals on social media. They do not care in that moment about soft power. What they need is someone standing between them and their family and the militants who seek to destroy them, to behead them, to crucify them and rape their children.

Sometimes hard power is necessary. In this case, it is being provided, thank God, by the Kurdish militia, and we should be providing some measure of practical support to them. That is precisely what we are doing.

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• (2300)

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly the debate tonight is carrying a great deal of emotion on all sides, and I applaud the Minister of Employment for his comments.

The Prime Minister has said numerous times that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, poses a global threat. If Canada and the U.S. view ISIL as a threat, one can easily imagine how it is viewed among countries in the region. ISIL has made no secret of its expansionist views. For Iraq's neighbours and for Canada's friends in the region, ISIL is not a long-term threat; it is an immediate and very direct one. After standing on the front lines with Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers, our Minister of Foreign Affairs witnessed first-hand what it feels like to be within shooting range of these terrorists.

It comes as no surprise that ISIL's recent advance in Iraq has caused many countries of the region to reframe their priorities. ISIL's extremist violence has resulted in common cause among Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel, among others. Like Canada, these states consider terrorism to be the single greatest threat to the region. This includes both Sunni extremist groups like ISIL as well as the state-sponsored terrorism of the Iranian regime and its proxies and allies, including Hezbollah.

Currently ISIL controls significant territory in both Syria and Iraq. ISIL is moving fighters, equipment, and weapons between the two countries without consideration for international borders. In both countries it plays an equally destabilizing role. In both countries it has generated unprecedented humanitarian catastrophes.

However, the situation in Syria is very different from the one in Iraq. There is a government in Baghdad that Canada and its allies can work with, a government whose aim is to protect its people, not to slaughter them. That government has asked for the support of the international community to defeat ISIL. If Iraqi security forces, supported by an international coalition, manage to halt or reverse ISIL's gains in Iraq, ISIL will likely continue to threaten Iraq and other states of the region from its bases in Syria. Canada welcomes intensified U.S. efforts to destroy and degrade ISIL's capabilities in the region.

Iraq also shares a border with Iran, the greatest state sponsor of terrorism. Iran must share the blame for creating this crisis in the first place. Its support for the murderous Assad regime, its constant regional meddling, its arming of Shia militants, and its bankrolling of terror are not exactly contributing to stability and security in that region.

Despite a so-called "charm offensive" by the Iranian leadership over the past year, the toxic reality of Iranian meddling in Iraq remains. Iran continues to run its Iraq policies out of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force's headquarters. The IRGC Quds Force is a listed terrorist entity responsible for some of the deadliest terrorist attacks of the past decade. This force, which is part of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, can only compromise efforts to bring peace and stability to Iraq and the region. It is arming Shia militias within Iraq, which undermines attempts by the new government to gain the trust of its Sunni population. While the Iraqi government is trying to bring its people together regardless of religion or ethnic group, Iran is promoting discord and violence

among Iraqis. Iran is sowing the seeds for a longer-term conflict, one that risks inflaming sectarian tensions throughout the region.

Thankfully, other countries in the region have stepped up to the plate on a constructive and very important role. The gulf countries have roundly condemned and rejected ISIL's disgusting brand of terror.

• (2305)

Last week, Saudi Arabia hosted a meeting in Jeddah, which was attended by 10 Arab foreign ministers and the U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry. The meeting resulted in a commitment by the group to a coalition to counter ISIL's presence in Iraq and Syria. The group stated that participation would include, "...as appropriate, joining in the many aspects of a coordinated military campaign against ISIL".

The Arab League also met earlier this month and agreed on the use of all necessary measures to counter ISIL. Indeed, our friends in the Gulf and elsewhere in the region recognize, as we do, that countering ISIL and its despicable brand of terror will require a combined international effort.

Gulf countries have also provided generous assistance to address the humanitarian crisis caused by ISIL. Saudi Arabia, for example, contributed over \$500 million of humanitarian assistance to Iraq.

Saudi Arabia's highest religious authority, its Grand Mufti, has unambiguously condemned ISIL and al Qaeda, describing them as the enemy number one of Islam. Last month, it also donated \$100 million to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, or UNCTC, for efforts to combat terrorism.

Another of our close partners affected by ISIL's campaign is Turkey, which represents a beacon of stability in a fracturing region. ISIL is a serious threat to the security of our ally. Iraq is also Turkey's second largest export market, so the economic consequences of the crisis have been severe. Turkey has also been steadfast in condemning the brutality of the Assad regime in Syria and it has, like Jordan and other countries of the region, selflessly hosted millions of Syrian refugees.

As a fellow NATO ally, Canada looks forward to continued co-operation with Turkey in responding to the threats to our collective peace, including the threat represented by ISIL.

ISIL's violence has had tragic consequences in the region. The atrocities it has committed on innocent civilians in Syria and Iraq, including the use of rape as a weapon of war, have resulted in the displacement of religious and ethnic minorities that have occupied this region for thousands of years. However, ISIL does not intend to stop there. It has made the region a magnet for terrorists and aspires to expand its so-called state beyond Iraq and Syria into Jordan and Lebanon.

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Such expansion would not only have disastrous humanitarian consequences, but it would destabilize the sectarian, ethnic and political map of the Middle East with consequences that we can hardly imagine. That is why we need to act together with our allies and friends in the region to counter ISIL and support an effective, inclusive and representative federal government in Baghdad, one that will govern for all Iraqis and preserve the rich, centuries-old fabric of this region.

Finally, we will continue to push for an effective, inclusive and representative federal government in Baghdad through our programming and diplomatic actions.

Several members of the international coalition that is forming against ISIL were present at yesterday's Paris conference on the peace and security of Iraq, including 10 countries from the region. Participants committed to support the Iraqi government by any means necessary, including appropriate military assistance.

As we build this coalition, let us not forget that some of the countries in the region, namely Iran and Syria, have different agendas. Although they may currently claim to stand on the right side of history, these regimes only aim to replace one brand of violence with another one just as cruel. They cannot be part of the solution when they are in fact a large part of the problem.

Canada is committed to working with countries that reject all forms of terror.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his speech. He discussed humanitarian aid, and I would like to raise the plight of children one more time tonight.

UNICEF is extremely concerned about the reports of children and women. Children are being abducted by ISIL in areas under its control. We also have recruitment of child soldiers.

As of September 8, some 195 cases of grave violations have been verified and referred to support. Thousands of children have witnessed abductions, summary executions and torture. These children require immediate attention to support their mental health.

In Dohuk province, there are 1,100 schools, and 700 of these are occupied. UNICEF is calling for these schools to be vacated. Support is urgently needed for innovative approaches to reach Iraqi children with education.

The government has given \$28 million in humanitarian aid. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has said it is insufficient. My question is this. Will the government give more, and what form will it take?

• (2310)

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, tonight we heard the Minister of Employment speaking a few minutes ago to the humanitarian crisis as it exists, as it affects children and families. As we know, and as the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated, our commitment to this point in humanitarian aid is insufficient, and I am quite confident it will be topped up with hundreds of millions of dollars pouring in from other corners of the globe with friends and allies in the region.

However, my concern goes deeper than that. While I worry for the children and I understand exactly what the member is articulating,

this issue will have far worse consequences as it unfolds unless we react more strongly. We have heard support from members of the Liberal Party tonight on its support of this direction, for which I applaud them. I also applaud those members of this House who went to Iraq last week and witnessed first-hand the atrocities and the evil that is permeating that region.

We have to do more. We have to react. Our government is doing just that. I think that as time progresses, we will see that we are on the right side of this argument and we must assist our friends.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is important to reiterate that our leader, the NDP leader, was the only leader who took the time to come and speak on this issue tonight, in contrast to the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Party, who did not bother showing up on this important issue, so the question—

The Speaker: Order, please. We had this point of order raised a short while ago, so I will just take this opportunity to remind the hon. member that it is not parliamentary to point out the absence—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I did not point out any absence. I said they did not—

The Speaker: I did hear the hon. member refer to a specific member. I hear her apologizing so I will trust that she will not do it again.

There is another point of order. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am also the leader of a federal political party. I was not given the opportunity to have a speaking slot tonight, but I would like to have had such an opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, we need to reiterate that the whole issue here is that the Prime Minister and his government had indicated that they would ensure that Parliament would have a say, that this would be debated, and that we would be able to have a vote on whether or not troops would be sent out in the future on missions such as this one.

I want to bring to your attention as well the fact that the Rideau Institute also called this move reckless. It states, "Without a comprehensive strategy it is a reckless step, and it is a step that I don't believe that Canadians want." It has the same opinion that we do, which is that we need to have a strategy and we need to have the details in order to make an informed decision and in order for Canadians to be well informed about why we are sending our troops there.

This is a government that has cut funding up to 61% in some of the departments. This is a government that takes pieces or parts from museums to offset our equipment. We need to make sure that we are prepared and we need to make sure that we are doing it right.

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Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, having not heard a question in that series of comments, I just want to acknowledge that as Canada contributes to this crisis, we do so on behalf of the many minorities, the Christians, Yazidis, Sufis, Shiites, Ahmadis, and so many others who are being traumatized and attacked mercilessly by this evil of ISIL. I applaud those nations who have become involved in this crisis to ensure that, to quote the President of the United States, we “degrade and destroy ISIL” so that the region can return to a normal balance of long-standing peace.

● (2315)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to join in this important debate on Canada's military role in Iraq.

We are engaging in this discussion as our military is being deployed to help counter ISIS, the Islamic State, which has taken control of large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, killing and terrorizing civilian populations, targeting Shia Muslims and various minorities, including Kurds, Christians and Yazidis, and engaging in a whole gamut of international criminality, be it ethnic cleansing, genocidal acts, plundering ancient and protected sites, or executing journalists in a gruesome fashion, the beheadings videotaped and posted online for all to see.

[Translation]

Of course, we are all disgusted and enraged by such barbarism. The Islamic State must be stopped, and Canada should join our allies in order to do so. It is encouraging to see that many countries have declared their support and have committed resources to help defeat the Islamic State and restore peace and stability to Iraq and the Middle East. I am sure we will offer our full support and recognition to those who contribute to this important international mission.

[English]

As has been mentioned this evening several times, I hope that the government will provide more information about the role the Canadian military will be playing in Iraq, notably the timeline for deployment.

As we examine and debate Canada's role in combatting ISIS, it is critical that we take the time to review our role in Iraq through a wide-angle lens, indeed through an international prism. ISIS is really metaphor and message of a larger evil. Indeed, even if we were to defeat ISIS tomorrow, the global radical jihadist threat would remain. As such, we must consider how ISIS came to be and recognize the nature of the multiple threats it poses, understand the broader global context of the Islamic terrorist threat, and appreciate the radical ideology underpinning it, as I said, of which ISIS is only one part.

For example, in the spring of 2011 in the Syrian city of Daraa, 20 young Syrians, at the time, painted graffiti, expressing their desire for freedom and reform, what came to be known as a peace and dignity revolution.

When they were arrested and tortured, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in protest, chanting “peaceful, peaceful”. In response, President Bashar al-Assad's regime fired into demonstrators. This was followed by artillery and tank assaults against civilian neighbourhoods; the rape, torture and murder of their inhabitants; the

bombing of schools and hospitals; and the use of cluster munitions, thermobaric weapons and chemical weapons against civilian populations.

At the time, those of us who argued that what was needed was the implementation of the responsibility to protect principle, which was not only a matter of engaging, and not even necessarily military action, but which included expanding and enhancing global sanctions, establishing humanitarian quarters and civilian protection zones, holding the Syrian leadership accountable for their crimes under international law, and providing defensive weapons to the moderate opposition at the time.

Regrettably, those of us who recommended that kind of protective intervention were told that any intervention would lead to more sectarian violence, the likelihood of civil war, the jihadization of the conflict, and the like.

Regrettably, what happened as a result of all this was that jihadization and the beginnings of ISIS took place, not because we intervened but because we did not intervene. Indeed, one of the consequences of allowing the Syrian conflict to fester, of not assisting at that time what was in effect a peaceful protest, was not only that ISIS was able to take root but to develop and strengthen and spread out.

Three years ago, the world did not engage in the protective humanitarian measures that were required in Syria. Today we find ourselves sending personnel to confront a violent terrorist jihadist group that grew in part out of our own inaction and has gone beyond Syria. Moreover, ISIS represents a composite of threats, not only to Iraq and Syria but to the broader Middle East, a clear and present danger to the stability of the Middle East and indeed the international community.

● (2320)

It has, of course, been violently taking control of Syrian and Iraqi territory, threatening and brutalizing civilian populations as it advances, but ISIS has also been a destabilizing force in the Middle East as a whole, particularly in countries bordering Syria and Iraq. Not only do countries such as Jordan and Lebanon continue to deal with an influx of refugees from neighbouring conflicts, but some support for ISIS has even been found to exist in these countries themselves.

Indeed, *The New York Times* has reported that shops in Lebanon sell ISIS paraphernalia, and ISIS flags can be seen flying on the streets in the Lebanese city of Tripoli, near the Syrian border. There has been some protest support with regard to ISIS in Jordan. Therefore, as appears to be happening, the effort to combat ISIS must also include support and contributions from Muslim countries in the Middle East to ensure that its ideology and its physical presence do not spread.

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As well, ISIS poses a further threat in that it has attracted, by some estimates, as many as 12,000 foreign fighters. Its own force has now increased and is now believed to be triple the size it was originally and is estimated to have over 30,000 people. These foreign fighters include many from the west, including Canada. It is disturbing to learn of Canadian youth from Calgary or Timmins becoming engulfed by the hateful ideology of ISIS and joining the group's murderous campaign.

Moreover, the possibility that some of these individuals could one day return to Canada and seek to put their pernicious ideology into practice on Canadian soil cannot itself be discounted. Importantly, therefore, the Canadian Council of Imams, along with other leaders of Canada's Muslim community, have condemned, in their words, the Islamic state's "narrow, bigoted, dogmatic distortions" and have called for "meaningful discussion, to engage preventative strategies and to find meaningful solutions to this growing threat in our country". Indeed, such efforts must be an important part of our anti-ISIS campaign, along with the military measures we are discussing tonight.

Thus, ISIS threatens Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the broader Middle East, and the international community at large and has even succeeded, on occasion, as I mentioned, in recruiting Canadians to join its cause. These threats must be met with the requisite response, military and otherwise. Canada must play its part, and the people of Canada should know what part we have signed up to play.

However, the unfortunate reality is that even if we succeed in defeating ISIS, as I mentioned, the global jihadist terrorist threat will persist. We must view ISIS and our efforts to combat it in that broader context, recognizing the similarities between ISIS and other jihadist groups and understanding that it is but one part of a larger terrorist threat.

I recently returned, for example, from an international conference hosted by the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center near Herzliya. Among the speakers and attendees were Iraqi Christians and Yazidis, moderate members of the Syrian opposition, and numerous international experts on terrorism and counterterrorism. One of the recurring themes of the conference was that we face not only one murderous radical Islamist group and ideology, such as ISIS, but an international network of radical Islamic terrorist ideologies. In the Middle East alone, in addition to ISIS, there are other radical Sunni groups, including al Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and radical Shiite groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, along with the leading state sponsor of terror, Iran, which has notably trained, supported, and financed both Sunni and Shiite radical extremist groups; for example, both Hezbollah and Hamas.

In Africa, groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia are likewise violent and dangerous. Indeed, there are likely more than 40 non-state radical Islamic terrorist groups operating in some two dozen countries. As British Prime Minister David Cameron recently said, these groups espouse "a poisonous and extremist ideology that I believe we'll be fighting for years and probably decades".

Indeed, another of the recurring themes of the conference was the need not only to fight terrorist groups militarily but to combat this poisonous ideology that underpins and nourishes their totalitarian objectives. This fight, therefore, must occur not only in the theatres of conflict, such as Iraq and Syria, but also here at home, where necessary, where some of our youth may be targeted for recruitment. To this end, as I indicated, co-operation and engagement with Muslim communities and community leaders in the west are essential.

• (2325)

Another important way of combatting such terrorism is cutting off its funding. In addition to Iran, Turkey and Qatar have become significant sponsors of terrorism, notably of ISIS and Hamas, and so diplomatic and financial measures could dovetail with military ones, choking off financial support for terrorist groups.

Perhaps one of the most significant things that could be done to combat terrorism is to ensure that it does not succeed to begin with, that it is not rewarded, validated, and nowhere legitimated while groups that do not adopt terrorist tactics, such as Tibetans, do not receive our attention and support. Every payment of ransom, every prisoner swap, every moral equivalence or offer of legitimacy, every unnecessary concession to a terrorist group encourages still more terror.

Indeed, for example, suggestions that Hamas should be treated as a mere political party or placed on a morally equivalent plane with democracies that fight it is itself part of a pattern of indulgence that only encourages more terrorism. For example, if we are to combat Hamas as a terrorist group, we should engage in what I have elsewhere referred to as a kind of "six D" strategy, which would work as well with regard to other terrorist groups in that regard.

The first step is demilitarization. The second is the disarming of the terrorist militias, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the like. The third is the dismantling of the terrorist infrastructure. The fourth is the defunding of its sources. The fifth is the detoxification of its ideology. The sixth is development—in other words, a reciprocal response to these forms of demilitarization and dismantling of the terrorist infrastructure would be a massive program for reconstruction, relief and development.

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At the same time, we must ensure that groups that shun terrorist tactics receive our attention and support. For example, while parliaments around the world debate how to approach ISIS, while the subject will undoubtedly receive much attention at the upcoming UN General Assembly, and while it should be the subject of a UN Human Rights Council emergency debate, as I and others have proposed recently, one would be hard pressed to find a parliamentary debate about the plight of the Tibetan people, who have been facing repression for decades, but who, if they engaged in violence, would self-immolate rather than attack Chinese civilians.

All of this is to say that the struggle against terrorism and radical Islamist ideology is a complex, multifaceted fight. As Canadians go to Iraq to support efforts to combat ISIS, let us support them, let us have full information about the nature and scope of their mission, and let us not forget that the fight against ISIS is but one battle in a much larger war in which military, economic, diplomatic and humanitarian measures must all be brought to bear.

To conclude in that regard, first, we need to expose and unmask the critical mass of threat and the critical level of mass atrocity of ISIS and other radical terrorist Islamic groups. For example, we have seen in a poll taken now that 61% of American voters believe that the U.S. taking military action against ISIS is in the national interest, versus 13% who do not. However, when asked last year about the U.S. taking action against Syria after its reported use of chemical weapons, only 21% said that action was in the nation's interest, while 33% said it was not. I believe that it is the exposure of the barbarism of ISIS, including the theatrics of its barbarism, that has helped to mobilize public opinion. We need to really expose and unmask the critical mass, not only of threat but the critical mass of mass atrocity that has been engaged in.

Second, we need to expose and unmask the radical and murderous ideologies that underpin ISIS and the other terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda, al-Nusra, Islamic Jihad and the like, which pose a clear and present danger, as I indicated, not only to the stability of the Middle East but to Europe, North America and the like.

Third, we must expose and unmask the genocidal anti-Semitism of these groups. This is not a term that I would use lightly or easily, but there is no other term to describe the toxic convergence of the advocacy of the most horrific of crimes, namely genocide—it is a word that we should even shudder to mention. Embedded in the most enduring of radical hatred, namely anti-Semitism, is the propagation of terrorist acts and furtherance of both this genocidal objective and these radical, hateful ideologies.

• (2330)

Fourth, we need the U.S. and allies to step up efforts to choke off, for example, the Islamic State's funding. In particular, we need to focus on steps to choke off the oil sales of the Islamic State, its donations from the Persian Gulf and its extortion rackets. Officials said their strategy is highly dependent on the co-operation of Middle East allies such as Turkey, Qatar and Kuwait in preventing the flow of finances and fighters into the Islamic State's war machinery.

Since the primary source for the Islamic State's fund comes from its sale of oil and refined petroleum, therefore, what needs to be done is to curtail their capacity to engage in such sales and to cut off the capacity of those that assist them financially in that regard. We also

need to ensure, and with this I close, that terrorism is not rewarded; that recruitment of Canadians and others is countered, as we have begun to do here in Canada with the engagement and the leadership of the Muslim communities at its helm; that we have a program and policy with respect to protect against the returning jihadist committing terrorist acts in this country. As I said, only a comprehensive approach involving military, diplomatic, political, economic, humanitarian and educational measures will achieve this.

We always have to appreciate that terrorism constitutes an assault on the fundamental security of a democracy, be it Canada, Europe, or otherwise, and that counter terrorism is really a response in the protection of human security, the security of a democracy and the security of the life of each of its inhabitants. Equally in the Middle East counter terrorism at this point will be and will serve the protection of the inhabitants of the countries in the Middle East who are in the first line of threat from these radical jihadist groups symbolized by ISIS, but not limited to ISIS.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague who has always been very informed on these issues has raised some concerns that have not been brought to the House before his speech tonight. He talked about the security of the Middle East. There are significant reports telling us that there are cells of ISIS in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. I wonder if he would like to comment further on how these are going to impact some of those countries.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I recently returned from a conference on terrorism that was held in Herzliya in Israel and the description there was, for example, of a triangular terrorist threat in the north, which emanates from Hezbollah. We should not forget that while Hamas has 10,000 missiles, it is estimated that Hezbollah at this point has over 100,000 missiles that could reach any point in Israel. Therefore, there is a terrorist threat that emanates from Hezbollah.

We also have al Qaeda elements in the north. We have al-Nusra elements also in Syria. We have ISIS of course centred in Syria. Therefore, we have even more than a triangular threat in the north. We have a triangular threat in the south coming from Hamas, from Islamic Jihad, from al Qaeda in Sanaa. We have a triangular threat from the east coming from Iraq, coming possibly from incursions from Jordan and coming, of course, from behind it all, Iran, which as I said finances, trains and arms in this instance both Hamas even though it is Sunni and Hezbollah even though it is Shiite. We have Iran, which is a state sponsor of terrorism, financing, arming, training, encouraging all these non-state radical terrorist actors.

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We have to have an appreciation of all that. What I mentioned with regard to Israel is also true, though not in the same scale of threat but nonetheless, for Jordan. Jordan is also threatened in terms of al Qaeda elements in Jordan, ISIS elements there as well, al-Nusra Front as well. We have to protect the stability of states like Jordan, like Lebanon, like Israel, like Saudi Arabia at this point, which is finding itself under threat. Ironically enough—

● (2335)

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there because I know there are other members who wish to ask questions or make comments.

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

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the very comprehensive speech of my hon. colleague from Mount Royal. However, I would like to ask him this. He referred to part of this resolution in his speech, the UN Security Council resolution 2170, calling on all members to try to hold accountable any individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with al Qaeda for abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. Also in section 5, it urges all states, in accordance with their obligations, to co-operate in efforts to find and bring to justice individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with al Qaeda, including ISIL and ANF who perpetrate, organize and sponsor terrorist acts.

This was unanimously agreed to and certainly contemplates holding them to account and bringing them to justice.

Would the member care to comment on how that might be done, and emphasize this co-operation? This seems to require some major effort. Would he have any suggestions as to how the nation should co-operate in bringing this about?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways that this can be done. There can be intelligence gathering. We need to fuel the intelligence gathering with respect to matters of criminal acts. We need to refer, as was recommended with regard to Syria but then vetoed by Russia and China, both those from Syria as well as those from radical terrorist groups to the International Criminal Court for investigation and prosecution. That was not done. The exercise of the veto frustrated that. I might add that even without a veto we would get UN Security Council resolutions frustrated.

I mentioned that, for example, Hezbollah now has over 100,000 missiles. UN Security Council resolution 1701, which concluded the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006, called for demilitarization at the time, called for the disarming of Hezbollah at the time. What happened was that rather than get the disarming of the terrorist militia of Hezbollah, we got in fact an intensification of its rearmament.

Part of the problem is that we have been witnessing a culture of impunity with regard to these UN Security Council resolutions, and we need to mobilize the international community to ensure that these resolutions are implemented and not find a situation where they are not only breached but in fact mocked in such a way that the very disarmament that was supposed to have been achieved is replaced by a gross armament and then further terrorist acts.

● (2340)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to ask the hon. member for Mount Royal this question.

When we are examining ISIS, there is obviously a very complex picture that is presented by this appalling rise in a non-state terrorist organization. I am occupied by the question of how they got armed to the teeth. Can we not do something to stem the flow of weapons to extremists of this kind?

Does the hon. member agree? Would it not be a good idea for Canada to be in the forefront of efforts by the United Nations to promote the arms trade treaty to limit the sale and distribution of conventional weapons to control that market? Canada so far has not signed this treaty. It is on the verge of ratification with 45 nations having ratified. Fifty nations need to ratify. Would it not be prudent for Canada to sign and ratify the arms trade treaty to stop the flow of weapons to groups like this?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question because it gives me occasion to reaffirm what I have said in the House on a number of occasions, including with respect to these take-note debates. We should be signing and ratifying this treaty and undertaking all other measures in addition to that to prevent the smuggling of arms and to sanction those countries that are engaged in the arms trade, which regrettably we have not been doing as much needs to be done.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have seen that the United States has taken the initiative to create a coalition of countries willing to try to defeat ISIS. How important does my hon. colleague feel that it is to have an involvement of some of the neighbouring Arab countries in the region to show that this is not just a western type of initiative in terms of trying to dislodge ISIS, but really something that has a much broader support?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is crucial to have broader involvement of Arab and Muslim countries. Indeed, a significant number of them have indicated that they support the United States initiative, but they have to be also involved in concrete support. That includes, as I said, intelligence gathering and it includes providing an umbrella, a political as well as military umbrella, so that this is not looked upon as being the U.S. or the west against Arabs or Islam, but it is the U.S. in concert with the Arab League, in concert with countries constituting the Arab League, that this becomes a true, internationalized alliance, which is really an alliance against radical evil, and an alliance for the purpose of protecting the human security of us all, of the Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East as well as countries in Europe and North America.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to join the debate late in the evening tonight. I appreciate that much has already been said on this subject, the crisis in Iraq. My remarks tonight will probably be a bit brief, but I hope to bring out a few aspects concerning our humanitarian response to the crisis in Iraq and maybe a few comments that will overview and wrap up the debate tonight. I do appreciate this opportunity.

I will be sharing my time with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Consular Services.

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On September 5, the Prime Minister announced that a small number of Canadian Forces members would be deploying to northern Iraq: advisers and technical assistants on a non-combat mission. This is the latest of a series of actions that Canada has taken since last January to protect Iraqi citizens from the brutal persecution by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL or ISIS, which are the various names by which it chooses to be known.

We have seen armed violence that has forced masses of people to flee their homes and their communities. It has created havoc in the entire country. We have all witnessed the brutal advance of ISIS and ISIL forces. We have seen the images on television of the mass murder of disarmed Iraqi soldiers, rape, pillage, convert-or-die edicts and the brutal death by beheading of American and British hostages. All Canadians are aware of the carnage that is going on under the force known as ISIS or ISIL.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in Iraq to date, an estimated 1.7 million have been displaced throughout Iraq and countless more are under threat. The surviving people—children, elderly people, women and men—are living in dire conditions. Thousands have taken refuge in schools, churches, mosques and unfinished buildings. Some are trapped in contested areas with no access to food, water or medical care and are extremely vulnerable to more armed attacks. In regions hosting large numbers of displaced people, local hospitals and clinics are under extreme pressure.

Recent clashes in the Kurdish region of Iraq have led to concerns that the situation will worsen. Let us remember that in the last few years some 215,000 Syrian refugees have already created an acute stress on essential services in that region and have sought safety in the Kurdish regions.

Canadians understand the actions we have undertaken. Our response to this crisis is a direct reflection of our own values, of our understanding that a country like ours cannot stand idly by while millions of Iraqi civilians are suffering.

Since the beginning of 2014, Canada has allocated more than \$28 million in humanitarian assistance to Iraq. Of this, \$19 million is in response to the recent civil unrest and almost \$10 million is in response to the needs of Syrian refugees in Iraq. It makes us one of the largest donors in response to the crisis. In fact, I believe we are the fifth largest donor to date.

With these funds, lives have already been saved. Food and clean water is being brought to displaced people in need. The camp supplies, tents and basic humanitarian needs are being delivered. Camps are being constructed through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to provide displaced people with shelter, and measures are being taken to protect people from violence. More important, health services and medical supplies are being made available to respond to the urgent needs of displaced populations.

Canada has delivered relief through four Canadian agencies, which have been mentioned earlier tonight: the Canadian Red Cross, Save the Children, Development and Peace and Mercy Corps. The Red Cross, for example, has been supplied through Canada's warehouse in the International Humanitarian City in Dubai. Many Canadians may not have heard of the IHC, the International Humanitarian City, in Dubai. It is a logistics centre for humanitarian

aid, with some 9 UN agencies and more than 40 non-governmental organizations, and they are focused on the delivery of aid in crises and long-term development aid.

Supplies are being delivered and distributed through the Red Cross and through Save the Children, and they are saving lives. Kitchen sets are helping to feed the hungry, and tents are providing temporary shelter and a place for the weary to get some rest and shelter. Hygiene kits and mosquito nets are preventing the spread of diseases.

• (2345)

For all these actions on the humanitarian front, Canada is showing that it stands with the people of Iraq.

It is important to recognize that since the beginning of 2014, \$20 million has been invested in Iraq. Before the ISIS onslaught, Iraq had been added to our list of targeted countries for development, a new partner, a recipient of Canadian investment and programming. We were working at that time on re-establishing schools and educational infrastructure. However, all the efforts to help establish normalcy and advance the situation for traumatized civilians, and Iraqi children in particular, for education, and to establish security, are now threatened by the ISIS invasion.

I had the privilege of visiting Jordan earlier this year and witnessing first hand the enormous human tragedy of hundreds of thousands of displaced Syrians seeking refuge in the camps in Jordan. I saw the enormous efforts and the compassion of the Jordanian soldiers at a frontier border crossing. They were helping men, women and children who were carrying what belongings they could bring with them across a frontier border seeking safety.

The Jordanians are doing a heroic job with support from Canada. They expressed support. We have provided them directly with ambulances. I know these Jordanian soldiers told us how much they appreciated Canada's assistance and also how much they appreciated that we came out to the frontier to witness what they were doing in trying to help people on the front lines. However, we should make no mistake, as the member for Mount Royal mentioned earlier, Jordan is also in the crosshairs of ISIS as are other countries in the region. It is out to destabilize the entire area in expanding its state.

The threat posed by ISIS is not something the western world can afford to ignore or take lightly. We cannot sit back and say "Well, it's over there. It doesn't affect us". The brutality unleashed by this force is evil personified. It is religiously driven, but without moral restraint or regard for human life or dignity. It is a force that must be faced head on with the collective wisdom and resources of the nations. We cannot turn our backs on the religious and cultural communities targeted for conversion, exploitation or destruction.

Yazidis have been driven from their villages. Men have been separated from their families and murdered, women and girls raped, or selected for forced marriages to ISIS fighters or sold as sex slaves. Christian communities that have survived for 2,000 years are being similarly decimated by ISIS.

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Tonight we have outlined Canada's response in providing what we have such as military transport planes, our Globemaster C-17 carrying mega-tonnes of suppliers, in many cases from our allies, non-combat military gear, helmets, body armour, tents and relief supplies for the people in peril. We are also sending in military advisers to help the fighters in the northern region in Kurdistan organize and be effective in pushing back against ISIS and protecting the civilians who have come to them for shelter.

Together with our partners in the family of civilized nations we need to find a way to contain this plague of terror. May God grant us collectively the wisdom, the strategy, the courage and the determination to see this evil contained and defeated.

• (2350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to ask my neighbour from Vancouver Island this question. This is a complex issue. There really are no simple questions in the 21st century, but this is a complicated one and it really is not a comic strip with good guys and bad guys.

We clearly can describe ISIS as a group of people who offend us through brutality, and the word “evil” is not out of place. However, solving it is probably not an easy question. If we bring military force to bear, do we create more martyrs? Do we unintentionally attract new recruits?

I am asking for a more multi-layered response from Conservative members, from the government. I am not opposed to the action that has been taken to send advisers to Iraq, but will it actually defeat ISIS? It is clear that western interventions from the beginning, when the United States decided that a good way to get rid of the USSR in Afghanistan was to create al Qaeda, are a problem. There are short-term expedients that create long-term problems. How do we think this through to provide the best possible result, to eliminate this kind of rogue force and the attraction it presents to misguided youth?

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, for her remarks and question. She is certainly right that this is a complicated issue. There are no easy solutions.

Canada obviously cannot solve this crisis on its own, but we are part of a coalition. In fact, I think it will take the collective resources of all the nations working together and working with the Arab nations in the region who are also threatened to deal with this threat. It will take a very concerted effort.

We are a small nation in the family of nations. We are a small number of people. We have resources, and I think it is very appropriate that we use the resources we have.

We do have experience that is valued and valuable to the military forces in Iraq that are trying to fight off ISIS and to the Kurdish forces there that have been the most effective so far in providing shelter to the civilian populations, so I think it is very appropriate that we share the expertise that we developed through many painful years in Afghanistan in managing fighters with similar ideology, techniques, and technologies.

We are doing everything we can with our humanitarian aid. We started with that in Iraq before the ISIS threat exploded. I think all of our efforts and humanitarian aid as part of the family of nations with

our UN colleagues, all the tents and relief supplies, are part of a temporary solution in providing relief. We will continue with our partners to look for long-term solutions.

• (2355)

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Foreign Affairs and Consular), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this evening I want to contribute to the debate with why I think it is important to act very quickly.

We note that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terror group has been carrying out murderous rampages across Iraq, seizing territory systematically and killing children, women, and men as well as displacing more than one million Iraqis. This has been very disturbing.

Only a few months ago, in February 2014, I was in Iraq to open up a trade office in Erbil. It was Canada's first trade mission to Iraq in 25 years. I was there opening the trade office to show that Canada had a strong commitment to support Iraq's democratic development.

On this unprecedented visit, I visited the cities of Basra, Baghdad, and Erbil. We expanded our presence by supporting Iraqis in their efforts to build a brighter future. Again, that was only this past February, which is why I believe this debate is important, but our actions must happen quickly.

I want to continue to talk about how promising it was. Canada was there to help Iraq build infrastructure, develop natural resources, and create wealth for its citizens. Canada felt that creating economic opportunity was how Iraq would regain both political and social stability.

In Baghdad I was at the first conference for Canada-Iraq commercial relations, and in Erbil I spoke at the first conference on Canada-Kurdistan commercial relations. These conferences brought together business leaders from Canadian companies and local Iraqi business representatives who wanted to conduct business in Canada with Canadians.

The trade mission, which was organized by the Canada-Arab Business Council, was primarily composed of companies in the oil, gas, and infrastructure sectors. During the trade mission, I met with the prime minister at the time, Nouri al-Maliki; the vice president; the minister of foreign affairs; Basra's governor; and the president of Iraq-Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani. It was there that I could confirm that Canada was resolved to support Iraq's efforts in reconstruction and in combatting terrorism, and confirm our commitment to support the Iraqi people in their ongoing efforts to build democracy and pluralistic federalism.

With that, I will wrap up.

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• (2400)

The Speaker: It is 12:00 midnight and we are out of time for this particular debate.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Thursday,

September 18, at 10 a.m., pursuant to an order made on Monday, September 15, and to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12:00 a.m.)

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