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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 6, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 6, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to Bill C-40, an act respecting the Rouge national urban park. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

* * *

[Translation]

LATIN-AMERICAN HERITAGE DAY ACT

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-634, An Act to establish Latin-American Heritage Day.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of introducing a bill to establish Latin-American Heritage Day. As my colleagues know, I was born in South America. Latin America, in its strictest sense, refers to the parts of the Americas that were colonized by the Spanish and Portuguese. However, in a broader sense, it also covers the Caribbean, including Haiti.

Why a Latin-American heritage day? Through my work and as an immigrant, I have come to realize that the Latin-American community is a close-knit one where everyone is connected. Then there is our telltale accent.

Our presence in Canada is relatively recent. It does not go as far back as the 19th century, more like the 1960s. Although the community has not been here for three centuries, it is well integrated into Canadian society on the economic, political—I am proof of that—and cultural fronts. There are great scientists, men and women, who have worked hard in academia. These people have integrated very well into the country.

People wonder where the Latin Americans are. We are everywhere because we fully invest in our choices. We love Canada, but we also hold on to our culture and our cultural attributes. It is for all those who have given their heart to this country that I want to establish a Latin-American heritage day.

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

* * *

• (1005)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, presented on Tuesday, June 3, 2014, be concurred in.

This being Veterans' Week, I am very pleased to be the first to speak to this debate and to take the time to honour the memory of all of our Canadian veterans who made sacrifices to keep us safe and protect our values and our ideals.

This year, Remembrance Day will be especially significant for Canadians. The shocking events that took place just two weeks ago remind us of what our soldiers are ready to do, what our veterans are prepared to sacrifice to protect us. This year, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent and Corporal Nathan Cirillo and their families will be in the thoughts of all Canadians.

Following those incidents, veterans across Canada decided to guard their local memorials. With great pride, they once again answered the call to protect these sacred memorials. I would like to thank them all. Canadians are extremely proud of them.

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I was also amazed by Canadians' great generosity following these incidents. In just one week, the Stand on Guard fund for the Cirillo and Vincent families raised over \$700,000 to help these families. I would like to thank all of the generous Canadians who gave to help these families overcome these utterly inexplicable tragedies.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Scarborough Southwest on the bill he introduced this week to make Remembrance Day a statutory holiday for all Canadians as of next year. I would also like to thank all of my House colleagues, who almost unanimously supported this bill. We will never forget.

We are here this morning to concur in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs' report on the new charter. On June 3 of this year, the committee presented its unanimous report on enhancing the new veterans charter. The committee held 14 meetings and heard from 54 witnesses. Naturally, the witnesses included many groups of veterans' representatives, veterans' health care research experts, and compensation experts. We heard from experts in all veterans-related sectors so that we could carry out a comprehensive study of ways to improve the new veterans charter.

From the beginning of the study, all the witnesses and veterans' groups testified to the urgency of the situation and the importance of improving the new veterans charter as soon as possible. Many also sent a clear message that the problems with the new veterans charter were known and had been identified much earlier in many reports and that the minister already had plenty of reports to support acting quickly to improve the charter.

Financial support, including the lump sum payment, the earnings loss benefit and the permanent impairment allowance; fairness for reservists; family, transition and employability were all among the most recurring themes raised by the witnesses during the study.

Of course the committee members really wanted to come up with a unanimous report because they did not want any ambiguity and they wanted to be able to act quickly to address the most critical and most obvious shortcomings in the new charter.

We therefore concentrated our efforts on the main priorities to show the government and the minister that certain points in the new charter had to be addressed immediately. Veterans have been waiting for these improvements to the new charter for eight years—eight years during which they have submitted various reports to our committee or the Senate committee and the ombudsman has also submitted reports.

Over the past eight years, since no changes were taking place and veterans' groups were increasingly dissatisfied, many tried launching class action suits. They felt the only way to get justice was to sue the government. Of course the government had every opportunity to improve the quality of life of our veterans, but it chose to make them wait.

● (1010)

The minister wants to wait. He says he supports the report, but the changes will have to wait because he needs more time. It is totally ridiculous. As I said, the witnesses were practically unanimous. The minister has all the information he needs to act quickly, but more than six months after the report was tabled, we are still waiting for

the minister to do his part, make the changes to this new charter and improve veterans' quality of life.

We are extremely disappointed that the minister is saying that he needs more time. The report was unanimous. I had hoped that the minister and the government would listen to reason and act quickly.

The government has decided to adopt a two-phase approach.

First, the minister will study the non-budgetary recommendations and those that might be covered by Veterans Affairs' current budget. If the minister thinks we can improve the charter and the quality of life of our veterans without significant additional funding, then he is sadly mistaken. Veterans should not have to pay the price for the Conservatives' political choices and suffer because of the government's austerity measures. They made sacrifices for their country and deserve to get proper compensation befitting those sacrifices.

As far as the second phase is concerned, the fact that the government has not provided any timeframe worries me greatly. The way things are going, veterans might have to wait until 2016 to get tangible results when it comes to the lump sum payment or the earnings loss benefit.

If the government does not introduce financial improvements until the next budget, the election may very well be called shortly afterward and the budget bill could die on the order paper, which means we would have to wait for another bill along with the studies that go with it. Veterans might still have to wait for years. This is totally unacceptable. We need a bill right away. We must improve the quality of life of our veterans now—we needed to yesterday—not tomorrow, not in the next budget, which could die on the order paper given that the election will be held in October. We need the minister to act on this immediately.

I am not the only one to say this. In fact, the Royal Canadian Legion made largely the same comments in a press release.

Here are some excerpts from a press release issued shortly after the minister's response was tabled:

The Royal Canadian Legion is disappointed with the current government's lack of progress...

...it is the belief of the Legion that the government has had more than enough time, and certainly enough input from subject experts, to be able to take solid action on improving the [New Veterans Charter]...

The lives of these Veterans and their families' cannot become an election or budget issue.

Like other veterans' groups, the Legion is also asking the minister to take immediate action and allocate the legislative and financial resources to ensure the well-being of our veterans and their families. They just cannot wait any longer.

The Veterans Ombudsman issued this statement:

...I am concerned with the timetable of the phased approach...

Budget for these four substantive recommendations must be included in the Government's 2015 budget or change will not happen for several more years.

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The Legion and the ombudsman agree with us. They are also worried about the possibility that the key measures will die on the order paper. Our veterans cannot wait any longer. It is imperative that we take action right now. I cannot say it enough: the situation is urgent.

●(1015)

The minister had everything he needed to take action last month and the month before that, but we are still waiting for proposals to improve the new charter. That is completely unacceptable.

I will now talk about the main problems with the charter and about how the Conservatives and the minister have failed to take action on certain issues. These needs are urgent and I will explain why.

The committee studied the government's obligations and duties towards veterans. The veterans' group Equitas Society filed a class action lawsuit against the government, since it felt that the new charter was completely unfair and that it violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Over the course of this lawsuit, the government's counsel argued that the Canadian government had no sacred duty towards veterans and that there was no difference between veterans and other Canadians.

Most veterans' groups were quite rightly outraged by the counsel's statement. What is most shocking is that after these veterans' groups said they were outraged by the comments, the minister chose not to call in his counsel and instruct him not to make such comments, since that sacred duty has existed for more than 100 years.

No government before this one has dared question the sacred duty of all Canadians to take care of veterans wounded because of the nature of their duties.

The committee therefore decided to add a few amendments to the preamble of the Pension Act. The government responded that it would introduce a bill to amend the charter by incorporating this recognition of the government's duty to our veterans. However, it took months for the minister and the government to recognize this duty.

I am very pleased that the government is finally coming to its senses and acknowledging the existence of this sacred duty and of the pact between the government, Canadian citizens and our veterans.

Furthermore, the lump sum payment is another problem raised by most of the witnesses. Right now, the maximum lump sum payment to compensate for service-related disabilities is \$300,000. If we compare that to the compensation provided by civil courts, the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, for example, offers maximum compensation of \$350,000. That is a difference of \$50,000.

Can we compare the injuries of a civilian employee with the injuries of a soldier? Obviously, they work in very different work environments. Directly comparing these two different kinds of compensation does not take into account the fact that soldiers face immeasurable risks to their safety and their lives. When soldiers are ordered to do something that puts their lives or their safety at risk, they cannot refuse. However, when employers ask civilian employees to do anything at all, they have the right to refuse if they feel that

it puts their safety at risk. That is one of the key differences between military and civilian employees, so the two cannot really be compared.

The allowances disadvantage soldiers, and yet they cannot refuse an order even if it puts their life in danger. They deserve to be generously compensated, just like civilian workers. I think most Canadians would agree.

●(1020)

When the minister said that a veteran can get nearly \$800,000, or something like that, there was a catch. He mentioned that a few months ago. I want to try to explain this a little. When the minister said that, he was adding up all the veterans' allowances and the benefits under the service income security insurance plan, which is something that soldiers pay into from their salary. Military personnel pay for their own insurance, while the government sends them into danger and they have no right to refuse. The minister should therefore stop considering this insurance as some form of benefit for veterans and active military personnel.

There is also another problem with how the amount paid out is determined. The amount is paid based on the table of disabilities. Sum X is paid depending on the type and degree of disability. Getting the maximum amount would require a total and permanent disability. A number of injustices were brought to our attention.

I am thinking about a veteran named Bruce Moncur, who is a striking example. He got a serious head injury and underwent several surgeries to save his life. He lost 5% of his brain in the process. Then he had to courageously face the side effects and the necessary rehabilitation.

After those surgeries to deal with the injury, he was awarded \$22,000 in compensation from the government. That is right. This veteran received \$22,000 for a major brain injury that greatly affected his quality of life. Obviously, that is nowhere near enough. This veteran, in his early thirties, will have to live the rest of his life with the scars and with unreasonably low compensation.

The government cannot continue to award lump-sum payments that do not adequately represent the degree of disability, as in the case I just mentioned. Veterans have to be awarded an amount that demonstrates the appreciation Canada has for those who have sacrificed their physical and psychological well-being, especially in light of a deployment to Iraq. The government needs to resolve these issues quickly, so that our soldiers serving overseas can have peace of mind knowing that they will be adequately compensated. Should they get seriously injured, they should not have to be concerned about their financial security afterwards, as is the case for far too many veterans.

One of the other priorities presented to the committee was the amount for the earnings loss benefit. It is set at 75% of the soldier's gross income. In comparison, injured federal public servants receive 85% of their net income as compensation, as stipulated in the Government Employees Compensation Act.

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I could go on for much longer. I will quickly conclude my remarks. As I mentioned, the earnings loss benefit was one of the key elements. An amount equivalent to 85% was proposed, the same amount paid to federal public servants. Our veterans and military personnel deserve the same compensation as other government employees. That is not the case, as they receive 10% less. We must quickly fix this.

Another problem brought to the attention of the committee concerns everything surrounding the earnings loss benefit. The ombudsman pointed out that 48% of veterans with a total and permanent incapacity are not receiving the benefit or the supplement, while those eligible for the benefit qualify for the minimum amount.

● (1025)

Therefore, nearly half of all veterans are not eligible for the earnings loss benefit. The few veterans who do qualify—less than half—fall in the third category, which pays the least. We definitely have to address this problem.

A huge number of problems were raised in committee. I will conclude by saying that the minister has known about these problems for a long time. He must act quickly and introduce in the House substantial improvements to the new veterans charter that will address all the problems raised by this committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the veterans committee has come up with a working document on the veterans charter that is of great benefit not only to our veterans but to Canada as a whole. As we recognized the many deficiencies in government policy, a series of recommendations was brought forward. This was done in part because of the hard work of committees, which clearly shows how beneficial it is to have our committees meeting.

Even though the veterans affairs committee has met a few times since the beginning of September, it has missed committee meetings. Other committees have not met since June. I am asking the member if he recognizes the valuable work of committees and whether it would be a mistake to have the veterans committee or any other committee not meet because of procedural plays by any irresponsible political entity in the House?

The Deputy Speaker: Based on the number of rulings that have come from the Chair, I am going to rule that irrelevant and move on to questions and comments.

The hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for that decision. We are fed up with the lack of respect for the House of Commons.

My colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant just delivered a passionate statement about veterans. A report was presented, and I would like him to comment on the government's reaction to that report. Just a few weeks ago, I was outside the House of Commons on Wellington Street, and I saw veterans selling t-shirts to raise money for their prescription drugs.

This government has ignored veterans, and that is disgusting. We saw the government's response. Can the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant tell us more about the government's response to the report?

● (1030)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster for his comments and his question.

As I said, the report was presented on June 5. During the committee's study, most veterans' groups made the same kind of comments. The minister has received quite a few reports over the past eight years.

I have to say that the new veterans charter was brought in by a minority government in 2005-06. Veterans were promised that, even though the study of the new charter was not exhaustive, the plan was to improve it significantly as problems cropped up and were reported, whether in committee or in the ombudsman's report.

However, in the past eight years just one minor improvement was made, and that was in 2011, despite the many reports that had already been presented by then. I mentioned the ombudsman's reports, many of which pointed to all of the flaws we discussed and others he observed. Committees have also presented numerous reports. Many studies have been presented over the past eight years.

As I said, these veterans groups told us in committee that they were exasperated. They could not wait any longer. They said that the minister had received enough reports, and they wondered why a new one was needed. That is the question we heard countless times during this review in committee. For years, studies have shown all the flaws in the new veterans charter.

The minister is turning a deaf ear. He claims he still needs more time to study the recommendations. That is totally unacceptable. He knew the problems. He had the tools to act quickly, but he chose to wait for budget surpluses. That is totally unacceptable. The government is running a surplus on the backs of our veterans. It is deplorable and unacceptable.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant for his speech.

We have been in politics for years now and we have seen this problem persist, insofar as we are unable to be consistent. People are prepared to make major sacrifices for us. When they are active in the army, we support them. However, as soon as they leave the system and they become veterans, suddenly everything becomes difficult, as if in return for their full commitment, we are giving them only a partial and inadequate commitment. It is absolutely deplorable.

I know that my colleague had 20 minutes to talk, but he also told us that he did not have enough time to explain the entire dynamic of this issue. I would like to give him the opportunity to tell us about one or two items he did not have time to address and that would help paint a more complete picture of veterans' needs.

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•(1035)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I did not have time to talk about several issues that were raised at committee and in the ombudsman's reports.

I began speaking about the permanent impairment allowance, which has three categories. Veterans do not qualify because the criteria are too restrictive. The ombudsman and the committee have pointed this out many times.

Less than 50% of our most seriously injured veterans, those with permanent injuries that prevent them from working, can access the permanent impairment allowance. Furthermore, when they are placed into one of the three categories of allowance, one of which pays out less, almost no veterans are eligible for the \$1,700 category because the criteria are too stringent. However, some of them should qualify for it. These criteria should be relaxed in order to allow more of our most seriously injured veterans to access this benefit.

We are also talking about taking care of the families. Several witnesses said that there was no support for the families. For example, the women who have to quit their jobs to look after seriously injured veterans should be recognized as caregivers. The wives and children of veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder have very complex and difficult lives. However, they do not automatically have access to psychological services. These families have been severely affected and should receive better psychological support.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a veteran, I am delighted to be here to speak on behalf of veterans today, and I am delighted that the parliamentary committee produced the unanimous report we are discussing today. The report, "The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward", charts a common path forward for veterans' programming in Canada. It represents an incredibly important and significant achievement, and I am proud to have been able to contribute my insights as a veteran, and I thank members of all three parties for producing such a thorough report. Unfortunately, what surprises me is that so much of it seems to be forgotten in what I have been listening to today. If I may, I would like to take a few moments to confirm some of the basic facts for the rest of this debate.

For example, Canadians should know that if any of our men and women in uniform are injured in the line of duty, they are eligible for an upfront disability award worth as much as \$301,000, tax free. As well, these same individuals may receive ongoing disability benefits and other supports that can climb to as much as \$10,000 per month. It is also important to note that under the new veterans charter, ill and injured veterans and still-serving members now have access to comprehensive rehabilitation programs. This includes full physical, psychosocial, and vocational rehabilitation services, as well as health care benefits and one-on-one case management services for those who require such help.

These are just some of the highlights of the new veterans charter that was implemented by our government in 2006 with the unanimous support of Canada's Parliament the year before. It is this comprehensive and modern nature of the new veterans charter that convinced the members of this House's Standing Committee on

Veterans Affairs to clearly restate support for it. It is the right way to go with veterans' programming in Canada.

However, the care and support Canada provides to its veterans and their families goes well beyond the new veterans charter. For example, more than 100,000 veterans, survivors, and caregivers are receiving our help with everything from year-round housekeeping services to the shovelling of their driveways in the winter and the cutting of their grass in the summer. In fact, the list of services available to veterans and their families is astonishingly long. I have heard some call it cradle-to-grave care that extends from benefits and supports for young families to long-term care and funeral and burial programs. What is more, we have been consistently enhancing these programs. We have been improving the benefits, services, and programs that are so essential to the men and women and the families we serve. Simply put, I believe I can rightly claim that no other government in our modern history has done more to meet the needs of our veterans and their families.

In fact, since 2006, we have invested almost \$4.7 billion in new funding to enhance our veterans programming. While this increased funding is significant by itself, it is even more remarkable when we consider the uncertain global economy we have been operating in for well over the last half-dozen years. We have been increasing our spending on veterans even as we have been engaged in some of the most difficult belt-tightening exercises.

Canadians saw that in our 2014 economic action plan. It included, for example, another \$108 million over three years to ensure that modern-day veterans of modest means have access to a dignified funeral and burial. It also allocated \$2.1 million to enhance our delivery of vital services through our online My VAC Account, so that veterans and their families can conduct a variety of transactions with Veterans Affairs when it is most convenient for them. Just this past spring, the Minister of Veterans Affairs also announced a \$500,000 pilot project to study the use of psychiatric service dogs to assist in the treatment of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Our list of accomplishments in support of veterans is not just lengthy but very wide ranging. Among other things, we currently have legislation before the House to give veterans greater access to good jobs in the federal public service. We want to move qualified veterans to the front of the hiring line when they are released from the Canadian Armed Forces due to service-related injury or illness. We are also working closely with other employers to do the same.

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● (1040)

At the same time, we are continuing to recognize and honour all veterans and currently serving members for their service and sacrifice. That is why we held a National Day of Honour on May 9. It was so that all Canadians could express their pride and gratitude for the more than 40,000 men and women who served during the 12-year Afghanistan mission, and to pay tribute to the 158 brave Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice for our shared values of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and balanced justice.

That is why we also helped approximately 100 Canadian veterans return to France this past June for international ceremonies to mark the 70th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. It is why we launched the World Wars Commemoration period, with ceremonies and events on August 4 and September 10 to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the 75th anniversary of Canada's engagement in the Second World War respectively. Our veterans have contributed so much to our history, and we truly need to know where we have been to understand where we are going.

Between now and 2020, we will commemorate the many milestone anniversaries of Canada's extraordinary role in Allied victories of the First and Second World Wars. This includes a new national tribute we have unveiled for living veterans of the Second World War. Eligible veterans will receive a commemorative lapel pin and personalized certificate of recognition signed by the Prime Minister.

In short, we are striking an appropriate balance between commemoration and ensuring that veterans and their families receive the full support that they deserve.

As the Minister of Veterans Affairs has said, there is no better way to recognize and honour our veterans' service and sacrifice than to ensure that they are receiving the benefits and supports that they have earned. However, our government also readily recognizes that even the best programming needs to evolve if it is to keep pace with the constantly changing needs of those it was designed to serve. This is a message the committee heard many times in listening to the testimony of more than four dozen witnesses from all walks of life, including veterans and their various representatives, academics, and individual Canadians.

If there is one conclusion Canadians can take from the report, it should be our central finding on the effectiveness of the new veterans charter. I would like to read a paragraph from the report that expresses this point very well:

The Committee members unanimously agree that the principles of the NVC should be upheld and that these principles foster an approach that is well suited to today's veterans. This does not mean that improvements cannot be made. However, the legitimate criticisms of various aspects of the NVC should not overshadow the fact that it is a solid foundation on which to help veterans transition to civilian life when a service-related medical condition prevents them from continuing their military career.

That is what all members of our committee concluded: that the new veterans charter is a solid foundation.

Canadians can be proud of the work that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs did. Members of Parliament from all three federal parties rolled up their sleeves to work collaboratively. We

invited Canadians from across the country to weigh in and, as the Minister of Veterans Affairs has said, our government supports the spirit and intent of the vast majority of the committee's 14 recommendations. He has promised that our government will leave no stone unturned as we find innovative ways to build upon the substantial new funding we have already invested in our veterans programming since 2006.

In the short term, we will immediately adopt a number of measures. This means, for example, that we will be improving family access to psychological counselling services and developing a new training program to better assist the caregivers of our injured and ill veterans. We are going to help families care for their loved ones with the kind of insight and support they need and deserve. We are also going to work with our key partners and stakeholders to find the right policies and programs to meet the more complex issues and challenges facing veterans and their families.

We value the ongoing input and advice of the Veterans Ombudsman and veterans' organizations and we want to make sure that Canada's brave men and women in uniform, past and present, can always count on the services and support they need. Our government's formal response to the committee's report delivers that today and beyond.

● (1045)

When I was on the defence committee, we had a study on the care of the ill and injured. Many of these issues came up at that time as well, and our obligation to support our veterans in every way we possibly can struck me profoundly as a member of that committee.

Times change, wars change, conditions change. This government is committed to being flexible in ensuring that the needs of our veterans today, tomorrow, and beyond are going to be met.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it curious that the member and the government have been saying for about a year that there is \$4.7 billion in new spending for Veterans Affairs. I would like to put this idea finally to rest. Through access to information, I have the actual figures: in fact, \$4.7 billion has never been spent in any year for Veterans Affairs, much less as an addition or a top-up to what is spent.

Here are the numbers: in 2006, the allotment was \$3.2 billion, with \$3 billion spent. It was \$3.6 billion as of last year, so when the member says \$4.7 billion in new funding, it seems to me it is about \$400,000 over the last seven years.

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I would like to know where the member finds there is \$4.7 billion in new funding, unless maybe a couple of months ago in 2014 \$4.7 billion extra, on top of this, was suddenly and miraculously spent.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for his question, but that is absolutely preposterous. This government has invested over \$4.7 billion in veterans over the years, as well as all the other monies that I talked about. There was \$108 million for the burial program alone. This government is absolutely committed to our veterans. It is absolutely committed to investing in our veterans.

As I said in my speech, we have endured some of the most difficult belt-tightening in recent years, yet this government continues to invest in our veterans because it is our veterans who have preserved the foundations of our democracy.

In that speech I also mentioned freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and balanced justice. It is our veterans who provided that framework for the rest of us to live in. This government will always invest in our veterans, now and in the future.

• (1050)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to serve with the member for Etobicoke Centre on the defence committee for a number of years, and I know we all thank him for his long service as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces.

He mentioned the veterans charter briefly in his speech. There seems to be a myth propagated by the NDP members from time to time that somehow they have always been opposed to the new veterans charter, when in fact they, along with all members of the House in 2006, unanimously supported it at all stages. There was no debate in the House. It was so critical to pass the new veterans charter for our veterans that it was passed unanimously at all stages.

I wonder if the member could talk about the history of the new veterans charter and how it was supported by all sides of the House when it was brought in.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. When the House brought in the veterans charter in 2005, all parties supported this measure unanimously, because regardless of the direction that debate may sometimes take in the House, all members of the House care about our veterans in Canada. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the NDP members, the Liberals, and the Independents all believe that our veterans are a national treasure and that all of us believe they deserve the best care.

We also unanimously agreed at committee to adopt 14 new points. Once again all members of that committee agreed unanimously to upgrade the veterans charter with 14 key critical points that are needed to enhance it because we all recognized that times have changed, veterans have changed, and generations have changed. The way people live today compared to the way they lived at the end of the Korean War, at the end of the First World War, or at the end of the Second World War is different, so we need to evolve our programs to be able to serve our veterans to the best of our ability.

It may not always be easy to do that, but as members of the House, we have to collectively and together ensure that our veterans get the

best care possible. The new veterans charter and the new committee report supporting all 14 new points will help us address those issues.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the statistical unpacking of the financial supports that back up the veterans budget.

I met a veteran coming back through upstate New York because he could not afford to travel through Canada on his way to Alberta to work. He told the story of a young 19-year-old who had fallen off scaffolding in the oil patch and was getting more compensation after working six months of his life on a job site than he was getting after serving 24 years in the military and encountering an explosion in Afghanistan that resulted in hearing loss, a disability in his arm, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

He said that after 24 years of serving his country, he could barely get a meeting with veterans affairs, and when he did, he barely got enough compensation. He said he had to go and work in Alberta to save the family farm in Nova Scotia.

How does the member opposite reconcile that life with the statements he just made? How does he reconcile that suffering with the supposed generosity of the government, especially when it is backdropped against the scores and scores of veterans who have protested the inadequacy of the government response to the very real life conditions they are facing on a daily and yearly basis?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, the government understands that sometimes mistakes have been made and that issues can arise with individual veterans.

However, the government is working very hard at cutting the red tape to ensure that veterans get the help and services they need from Veterans Affairs Canada as quickly as they need it. That is part of the 14-point plan. That is part of the mission of our Minister of Veterans Affairs. He has listened to veterans through veterans committee testimony and through testimony at the defence committee about the care of the ill and injured, and these things are being addressed.

All veterans have an option to access the veterans ombudsman when they feel they are not getting the kind of services they deserve.

• (1055)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member called my figures “preposterous”. In fact, I have the figures all way from 2006. This information is on a form signed by the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

I am not sure why the member thinks my figures are preposterous. Perhaps he thinks the minister is preposterous. I do not know.

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I would like the member to explain how he comes up \$4.7 billion in new spending, as he said in his part of the debate.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I know the member does deeply support and revere our veterans. However, he is wrong.

Throughout the economic action plan, all the figures are very clearly laid out as to what has been allocated to veterans affairs. Our hard-working and dedicated Minister of Veterans Affairs has worked very hard on this file to ensure that our veterans in Canada receive all the care and all the support they need. The 14 points that have been agreed to by all parties on the committee are going to address that.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I think the member will agree that perhaps the NDP does not like to add up the additions to the veterans affairs budget year over year to come up with a figure like \$4.7 billion.

I have a quote from another member of the NDP, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who frequently gets up in his place and castigates the new veterans charter. What he said in a news article was this:

The reality is, if you compare our veterans care for them and their families compared to the other countries in the world, I think we're right at the very top of that list.

I wonder if the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre agrees with the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore that Canada's care for veterans and their families is at the top of the list in the world.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member, and we are at the top of the list. If we compare the care that other nations provide to their veterans, we will quickly find that Canada is absolutely at the top of the list.

We continue to invest. I have some quick figures. We have invested \$2.1 million through the 2014 action plan for the delivery of programs and \$108 million to increase the burial benefit to over \$7,300, and there is much more. Since I am out of time, I will leave it at that.

In response to my hon. member's comment, I would say absolutely that the way this country treats its veterans is among the top in the world.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure to rise today to speak to an important issue, the veterans.

Like the previous speaker, I had the privilege and honour of serving as a member of the Canadian Forces prior to getting involved in politics. I have had the opportunity to attend many functions with today's veterans and with veterans who served in the past. I want to ensure that we are moving in the right direction.

In the last week or so, there has been a great deal of interest, love, and passion expressed to members of our forces by Canadians all across Canada, particularly because of a couple of incidents that occurred recently in Quebec and at the National War Memorial. It is important to put this in the context of our Canadian Forces.

I would like to repeat some of the things said yesterday in the House with regard to our veterans. My colleague from Guelph, the Liberal Party critic for veterans affairs, said it quite well. I would like to quote what he said:

In less than a week, thousands of Canadians will gather at the National War Memorial, just feet from where Corporal Nathan Cirillo stood when he was slain standing guard over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Hundreds of thousands more Canadians will join them at cenotaphs, Legion halls, and other memorials remembering his sacrifice and that of Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent. These two men were murdered just days apart by individuals who would have us be afraid.

There was a lot of response to what took place. I would like to quote the leader of the Liberal Party. This is what the leader of the Liberal party had to say with regard to the incident that occurred two weeks ago:

They want us to forget ourselves. Instead, we should remember. We should remember who we are. We are a proud democracy, a welcoming and peaceful nation, and a country of open arms and open hearts. We are a nation of fairness, justice and the rule of law.

What our leader said is what we are talking about.

It is worth noting the contributions our veterans have made since Confederation and prior to that. I am going again to quote the words of the member for Guelph from yesterday:

From its beginning a century ago, 625,825 Canadians fought in the First World War. A total of 61,082 never returned home, and 154,361 were wounded. In the Second World War, although the First World War was to be the war to end all wars, 1,086,343 served Canada; 42,042 died and 54,414 were wounded. In Korea, 27,751 Canadians served, and 516 gave the ultimate sacrifice, while 1,072 suffered injuries.

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers have served Canada as peacekeepers and have worn the blue beret, a lasting symbol of Canada's contribution to peace and order around the world. One hundred and twenty-one people have died for these values, and many more have been injured.

● (1100)

There is so much more one can make reference to, whether it is countries like Afghanistan, the Middle East, or other areas of the world where Canada has contributed by having members of the Canadian Forces participate.

It is important to recognize the essence of the report that has been provided and what it is actually attempting to do. It is somewhat dated in that the report talks about the importance of understanding the background of the new veterans charter today.

This is from the report:

The Veterans Affairs Canada—Canadian Forces Advisory Council was established by Veterans Affairs Canada in July 2000 to offer expert, arms-length advice, within the scope of that department's mandate, on how to address challenges facing members and veterans of the Canadian Forces and their families. The advisory council has been meeting twice yearly in pursuit of that objective. During its October 2002 meeting, the council concluded that, despite numerous improvements in a range of services and benefits now available to these very deserving Canadians, the time had come for comprehensive reform.

Again, this is something that was created back in 2000. Members can get more information on the timelines by going directly to the report I am quoting.

On May 4, 2004, in response to the Veterans Affairs Canada—Canadian Forces Advisory Council report, the Minister of Veterans Affairs [who now sits as the Liberal critic for citizenship and immigration] announced that the government was planning to "undertake the most fundamental reforms of Veterans' programs since the Second World War. This announcement also launched a wave of consultations on the five key components of this reform.

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The advisory committee, established in 2000, when Jean Chrétien was our prime minister, followed up with recommendations. My colleague, who is now the immigration and citizenship critic, announced five key components.

One component was “disability awards and wellness programs to replace today's pension system for new applicants”.

We had a question today regarding someone in the workforce who fell from scaffolding and received significant benefits that were more than one would receive for an equal type of injury in a different situation. They would have more benefits, even though they might have been working for a short six-month stint. We need to do more regarding that particular point.

● (1105)

Another key component was “physical and psychological rehabilitation services, including vocational training and education”.

We asked our soldiers to go over to Afghanistan on behalf of all Canadians. They are coming back and quite often being put directly back into civilian life or onto a military base.

It is not as simple as retracting the deployment and life going on. There are many types of injury that occur when we have military personnel engaged. Many injuries that were sustained were of a psychological nature. There are some mental illness issues as a direct result of that deployment.

We need to seriously look at the physical and psychological rehabilitation services being provided today. How many psychologist positions within the forces are vacant today? I have heard, through questions and answers during question period, that the government is not filling the positions that are vacant. It is important that we do that.

“Earnings loss support for veterans undergoing rehabilitation, as well as longer-term support for veterans who can no longer work because of a service-related illness or injury” was another recommendation.

That is an area where we have seen improvements, but have we really gone far enough? Again, when I say that we have seen improvements, this is something that was actually stated back in 2004.

I would argue that there are more things we could and should be doing. I will provide some comment on that shortly.

“Job placement assistance” and “More extensive health benefits to meet the needs of veterans and their families” were the final components.

One of the things we often overlook is the impact on families. Many of the injuries sustained by members of our forces, both physically and mentally, have serious ramifications for families.

We have members who have returned who have committed suicide. Arguably, if there were adequate resources to meet some of those needs, maybe some of those suicides could have been prevented.

We have physical injuries that members are finding very hard to overcome. There have even been issues regarding their ability to

collect pensions in time because of the time limits for qualifying for a pension. If they come back injured, that could lead to a discharge, which could potentially disqualify them from receiving a pension.

There are disturbances within families, whether it is a parent and a child or the breakdown of a marriage.

These are the realities when we have members of the Canadian Forces being engaged abroad and even on occasion here in Canada.

● (1110)

I think there is more that we could be doing. When we think of the veterans bill of rights and to whom it all applies, appendix E encapsulates it quite well. The bill of rights applies to all clients of Veterans Affairs and then it indicates who that is: veterans with war service, and veterans and serving members of the Canadian Forces.

A good number of people do not necessarily recognize the wonderful role that our reserves play in our modern-day force. Today our reserves are an absolutely critical element to any form of deployment or providing support. These are individuals who often have another life in terms of employment, and they take time away from that life in order to continue to contribute in our forces through our reserves. We need to ensure that we recognize those reservists and the efforts they put in. One only needs to look at Afghanistan to get a sense of the degree to which our reserves were involved.

When we think about who these clients are, it is not only veterans who are serving members of the Canadian Forces who are regular full-timers, but it also includes our reservists in many ways.

Members and former members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police also have some affiliation as clients of Veterans Affairs. When I was in service during the eighties, I would often run into members of our RCMP, and there was a sense of bondage there. I have flown in the back of a few C-130s, which is a transport-type of aircraft, where there would be a member of the RCMP. There is a wonderful relationship there.

When we think about the clients of Veterans Affairs, we also need to recognize that spouses, both through marriage or common law, are eligible. Survivors and primary caregivers are also part of the stakeholders. There are eligible dependents and family members, and there are even more clients than that. We need to understand and appreciate what their rights are and what their expectations are. First and foremost, we need to recognize the importance of them being treated with respect, dignity, fairness and courtesy.

These are not just my thoughts and words, these come right from the report. I would encourage people to go over it.

There is so much more that could be said. I would highly recommend to members that they take the time to review the report that was brought forward. There are many aspects, virtually all of them, where I believe one could get good solid consensus. Support is there for our Canadian Forces.

I applaud and recognize the valuable contribution that our standing committees make when they meet and contribute to reports of this nature. I would suggest it was time well spent. I look forward to seeing a continuation of the dialogue on this and other reports.

Routine Proceedings

•(1115)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague on the issue of veterans and the obligation that we have, as parliamentarians, to the people who put their lives on the line for us.

What I hear from veterans in my region all the time is that they are frustrated with the lump sum payments. There is a sense that the government has actually gone into court against veterans who have brought their class action lawsuit, veterans who have been in Afghanistan, and the government's lawyers claimed that there was no such thing as a social contract with veterans.

I find that a shocking statement. If they put the uniform on and risk their lives for our country, that contract is a lifelong contract. It cannot be written off with a single payment. When they are older, if they need help, it should be there.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, in particular, about the complaints that we have heard from veterans' advocates who say the entrenched culture within the bureaucracy is that they simply do not want to pay for benefits and they make it very difficult for people who have a right, having served this country, to receive those benefits. I would like to hear how my colleague feels about this.

•(1120)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the reasons why I highlighted the issue of the right of entitlement. It is in appendix E of the report, and it is that they be treated with respect, dignity, fairness, and courtesy. We will find that many of the vets we talk to feel that the government is not responding with that sense of respect, that there is more that the government could be doing.

The best example that I came come up with offhand is the decision by the government to cut service offices in Canada. There were a number of veterans' offices that were closed. Many of those offices are the front line for providing services to our veterans. By not allowing that service to be there or to remain, in essence, the government is sending a message that if veterans want something, they have to pick up the phone and call a 1-800 phone number. I believe that the government was wrong in closing down those offices, the service office in Brandon, Manitoba, being one of them.

The issue of compensation for our veterans, injured veterans, is something that is of great concern. My leader has talked about it. The Liberal Party critic has talked at great length about this. The government needs to be far more proactive at meeting the needs of our veterans.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say one of my great disappointments since being elected to the House is coming in here every day and seeing how our veterans have become a political partisan wedge issue, where there seems to be a willingness to try to assert that one party or another does not care for our veterans. I just think it is really unfortunate, in the political climate that we live in, that people would accuse others of that.

My grandfather joined the Royal Canadian Air Force at the end of the Second World War. My other grandfather was in the Royal

Canadian Navy in the 1950s. I have a cousin who served with the 3 PPCLI in Kabul, Afghanistan.

We all have veterans in our families. We all have veterans in our constituencies. We all care for Canada's veterans. I think that is why it was refreshing to see a unanimous report where that partisan wedge issue was put to the side and there was some agreement there.

I want to address, though, a specific part of the member's speech, where he talked about the Canadian Forces, and the way he put it, that it is willfully leaving open mental health care professional positions, that it is somehow not filling these positions.

That is simply outrageous. The Minister of National Defence is here. Every single person who comes forward who wants to work with the Canadian Forces, in terms of a mental health professional, if they are qualified, I bet he would sign them up today.

There is a shortage of mental health professionals right across Canada in all fields in the public health care system. I have had meetings in my riding through the #308conversations campaign with the Mental Health Commission. Mental health professional shortages are not just a phenomenon in the Canadian Forces. They are a phenomenon right across our society. It is very unfortunate.

I would ask the member to perhaps address that, to perhaps address the fact that we have the most mental health care professionals per capita in the Canadian Forces than any of our allies, and perhaps he could just correct the record, in that he would not want to leave the impression that somehow those positions are being left vacant on purpose.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member may be correct that we have the most positions per capita, but having a position and actually having that position filled are two different things. We know that there is a need to have the positions filled.

There are avenues the government could use to recruit. I have seen first-hand where individuals are provided incentives to enter the forces in selected professions and trades. There are educational programs, financial incentives, and so forth. It is not that different from a provincial department of health looking for specialty doctors. We do what we can. We have not seen an aggressive proactive approach coming from government to fill those vacancies. Therefore, he may like to say that we have the positions, but if the positions are unfilled it is somewhat misleading.

In earlier comments, the member made reference to the unanimous report. There was a great deal of goodwill in the report from the Liberal member who wanted to ensure that veterans were put first, as well as members from the government in coming up with the actual report. I even made reference to that in my comments.

Even though the report is here, there is a lot now that needs to be acted on within the report, which would make a profoundly positive difference for our vets if we are prepared to put the necessary resources and time commitment into making it happen.

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• (1125)

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sat on the veterans affairs committee several years ago and veterans are near and dear to my heart and to constituents across our community and across the country. All my colleagues will be at the cenotaph, not only November 11 but throughout the next week.

I know the University of British Columbia Okanagan will be attending a Remembrance Day ceremony with our Legion members of all ages. It is important that we continue to reflect upon the sacrifices that men and women have given and those who are serving today.

We can look at the changes and the positive addition of almost \$5 billion that has been earmarked over the eight years since our 2006 budget. We have invested in reorganization of the veterans affairs portfolio. As alluded to, there are 14 recommendations and there is all-party consensus on the committee moving forward.

One of the areas was the veterans independence program. I know for constituents, a spouse of a veteran applying for the program was not eligible if the veteran passed away. We made that positive change so the widow was eligible and the neighbours were eligible based on means. Another area is that they do not have to submit a \$35 fee and wait six weeks for an application form and take it down to the office.

Does my hon. colleague think those are some of the positive recommendations, or should we go back to the old way of having to submit the forms in person and not having the money up front for our veterans?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, during the early eighties I had the privilege, as a member of the Canadian Forces, to walk outside in the frigid weather in November. Among the people I marched with were war veterans. After marching in memory, we would go to local facilities where there would be an exchange of many stories.

I understand and I appreciate, through listening, the important role that Veterans Affairs has to play in providing for our vets, and where we can make improvements we should. Hopefully, in many ways, it can be done with unanimous support. However, where there are shortcomings it is important that opposition parties raise those shortcomings.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the distinct honour to rise in the House, with regularity, on issues relating to the Canadian Forces and our veterans. This is an important part of the reason why I ran for Parliament.

The most formative part of my life to date, my 41 years, were the 12 years I spent in uniform for Canada. I joined the military at 18, after graduating from Bowmanville High School. I attended the Royal Military College of Canada and served with the RCAF. I then transitioned to the reserves when I went to law school.

I have previously said in the House that when I left my military family and hung up that uniform, that transition was a difficult time. The decisions that flow around this are extremely stressful. In most cases, our young men and women joined around the same age I did, at 18. I did not have to write another resume until I left law school. I never had to apply for other jobs.

However, the difference between us being 18 or in our 30s, or even later when we leave, is we now have family, children and we will often be in a province that is different from where we enrolled, so our life has changed radically. It has changed for the better because I think almost every person who leaves the military finds it to be a rewarding experience and something that he or she feels proud of for life.

The reason why the new veterans charter was created was to help our men and women with that transition.

I share the concern of my friend from Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, that how in recent years the debate in this place has been lowered by using veterans and programs like the new veterans charter for political gain. In part, it is shameful because the entire House supported the new veterans charter, including my friend from Sackville—Eastern Shore, who is one of the few who has been here and worked on veterans issues all of those years. Several other members of the Liberal Party voted for it. It was a Liberal project. However, the parties came together because they saw the need to modernize the transition of our men and women out of uniform. The intention of the new veterans charter was to ensure there was access to skills training, education and faster health care so the transition to civilian life was smoother. That is why every sitting member of the House voted for it under the Martin Liberal government.

The new veterans charter has been implemented over the course of our government. The intention of that document was for it to be a living document to ensure it could be reviewed from time to time. Our government has already acted. We increased the permanent impairment allowance supplement for some of our most critically wounded soldiers from Afghanistan. Why? Because those who are most critically wounded have the most difficult time transitioning due to their injuries. They have a hard time finding permanent civilian employment after they leave the military. Our government has already moved swiftly to address that major issue.

I had the honour of sitting on the veterans affairs committee during my first year in Parliament. That committee was charged by the current Minister of Veterans Affairs with reviewing all aspects of the new veterans charter. I still meet World War II and Korean War veterans around the country who complain about the system that was in place before the new veterans charter and how records were lost, how they could not provide support for claims and how claims were rejected. We have been listening and the new veterans charter was an attempt by the previous government, and increasingly by our government, to improve that transition period.

We have also made good changes to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, such as putting more veterans on the VRAB to review these sorts of claims.

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●(1130)

I will use a few moments of time in the House to speak again about veterans' issues. I urge some of my colleagues in here, who use it as a wedge, to learn about the issues a little more, because I have been profoundly disappointed by the low level of knowledge. People are quick to complain, but very slow to actually research.

I have one main quote from the report by the veterans affairs committee on the new veterans charter. Two parts of its report are critical for the House to consider, especially the New Democrats who have brought this concurrence debate to the floor today.

The all-party committee thankfully removed most of the politics from its operations. The members of the committee heard from over 50 witnesses: veterans, veterans' advocates, people with experience in mental health and in veterans care. They put together a series of 14 recommendations, about which I will talk a little. What is important is that they unanimously agreed that the principles of the new veterans charter should be upheld, but that improvements to the charter were critical.

Members from all parties recognized that the new veterans charter provided a "solid foundation" for transition from military life to civilian life. There are aspects of the new veterans charter that need to be improved and updated, but the members of the committee unanimously agreed that the principles behind it in assisting that transition were sound. It is just that their execution needed to be done better.

I said earlier that the origins of the new veterans charter were in submissions by many veterans, including some veterans' groups that are now providing input on how we improve it. However, a lot were asking for more upfront transition support for men and women of the forces, including for those with injuries. That is what the new veterans charter tried to do. It also tried to ensure that health care was part of the transition mix for people leaving uniform quickly, and it still what it does that.

I have heard a few members of the House ask about the \$4.7 billion that has been discussed. I hope some of them are listening now. A good portion of those funds will go to benefits for soldiers injured in Afghanistan, having enhanced benefits through the changes we already made as a government with the permanent impairment allowance and permanent impairment allowance supplement. A good portion of it is for that. However, on a basic funding level, Veterans Affairs Canada has a budget that is about \$800 million higher per year than it was when we formed government.

I hear it said that this government is cutting from veterans. However, it is actually one of the few areas, while we have been trying to get back to a balanced budget, a principle that is important to our government, that has been largely spared. What I like most as a veteran, having worked after leaving uniform on veterans' issues passionately for many years, is our government is not stuck in the 1950s on how we care for our veterans.

Some people still talk about the Veterans Affairs offices in the House. They clearly do not understand how veterans are served. Those offices were opened around the country at a time when there was no national health care in the country. The only offices the Government of Canada had around the country were the post offices.

There was no network of services and there was no health care. Offices were needed to administer to the entire generation that served and that needed care, and in some cases needed direct relationships with physicians who were private operators.

Let us fast-forward to today and to our veterans who are in some cases leaving in their twenties and who have never had a bank book. They want to access not just their banking information, but their veteran's account on their smartphone or on their tablet. I have said in the House a few times that we have to provide services that support our veterans in their nineties and in their twenties. To do that, we cannot sit still. We have to provide a range of services.

What has changed from the 1950s to today is a network of almost 700 offices across Canada called "Service Canada" that were not there before. We now also have health care administered through the provinces, and care for veterans can be accomplished through transfers and relationships with the provinces, including some of the facilities that the federal government used to own but transferred to the provinces.

●(1135)

We all now know from the debates in the House that provinces administer the health care systems in their province or territory, so the federal government now has a partnering relationship. There is still some exceptional work going on at Camp Hill, Sunnybrook, some of the veterans hospitals, but they are part of the provincial health regimes and they work with Veterans Affairs for care for our veterans. That is what has changed.

It is critical to remind Canadians that Veterans Affairs offices, the brick and mortar offices, did not deliver any services. They were administrative centres. Now that same level of administrative support can be offered at the network of 700 Service Canada offices, which did not exist post World War II but do now.

My area of Durham and the region at large, with 500,000 people, never had a Veterans Affairs office. People would have to travel to Toronto. Now with Service Canada, that same level of administrative support can be obtained at five Service Canada offices in and around the edges of the Durham region. That is smart governance, and anyone who says it is not is playing games.

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Some of the offices that were closed had less than 10 people in them a day. In most cases, there is a Service Canada office that can offer the same level of support in the same building or down the street. As a veteran, it disappoints me that we actually took the advice of one veteran who had been highly critical of this. He said that the person in the Sydney Service Canada office would not have experience with veterans. We listened to him last October. I went to the minister personally. We ensured that when the Veterans Affairs office closed in Sydney, an experienced veteran case worker was transferred to the Service Canada office. With a caseload of about 10 to 12 people a day, one is appropriate to provide the same level of administrative support and guidance.

At the same time, over 15,000 veterans have signed up for the My VAC account, to manage their own Veterans Affairs accounts online. Most of them are the younger cohorts who I have talked about, in their twenties and thirties. Serving veterans is not about standing still. It is about doing things better and ensuring we can serve more people. We are committed to that.

I am proud of the uniting feature of the Conservative Party and this government. I am proud to serve in Parliament alongside members who have served in the army, the navy, the air force. We ensure this is a priority. There are 30,000 more survivors now taking part in the veterans independence program under our changes than before we took office. I think all MPs know veterans in their constituencies who benefit from the VIP, an appropriately named program, to help them stay in their homes.

With changes, not only have we allowed more people to qualify for that, we have made it easier. Therefore, instead of the administrative burden that families were telling us about of constantly having to submit receipts, mainly the children of veterans, there is now a case where they can be approved for such service and it can be done in advance. I have heard directly from people who say how much easier that is.

We have supported great programs that have popped up in recent years, like the work Wounded Warriors has done with service dogs, like the work the group of physicians and scholars at the University of British Columbia have done with the veterans transition program and the Veterans Transition Network, dealing with veterans with OSIs or PTSD. This has been funded by our government to try to take that great work UBC has done for about 20 years, since the Medak Pocket of Yugoslavia, and take it nationally.

We have increased and modernized the Last Post Fund, increasing both the amounts covered by the fund and extending it to modern veterans, not to ensure every veteran has a funeral paid for by his or her country, because I know most do not want that, I certainly do not, but all veterans want to know that indigent veterans and those who have fallen through the cracks will have those services provided. The Last Post Fund has done that for 100 years. Now will do it for the post-Korean War generation of veterans.

● (1140)

We have the veterans hiring act, where we are putting veterans as the top priority in hiring in the civil service. We know this will not apply to every veteran, because they still have to be eligible for that post within the federal government, but it sends a message when Canada's Parliament has an act and puts veterans in top priority

position. We are sending a message to employers across the country that hiring a veteran is not just the right thing to do; it is actually accretive to the bottom line. It would be hiring people with a track record of being able to work well on a team and take to training, and most people who join the military are inherently loyal; they want to affiliate with a uniform or a regiment. Therefore, in an age where companies are spending millions of dollars on retraining and recruiting in the fast turnover parts of our economy, hiring a loyal person can save money in the long term.

We created the veterans ombudsman position. I have the good fortune to speak to Mr. Parent regularly on these issues. He came from an amazing life as a search and rescue technician, one of our most dedicated and brave members of the Air Force who save Canadians. Now he is applying his passion to serving our veterans as the ombudsman. We take his reports very seriously as direct input that he is providing to the discussion on veterans care.

On top of our changes to the VIP, we have eliminated more than two million forms of red tape that were burdening our veterans, as a way of streamlining things. In some cases, our older veterans were having issues and falling behind on paperwork, or it was falling to their children to administer. We want to make it easier.

There are important commemorative things we have done. I still meet Korean War veterans who thank us for, a year ago, making it the Year of the Korean War Veteran to recognize the 60th anniversary of the conclusion of that war. That war has been described as the forgotten war because it came so close after World War II and was a UN-mandated mission. Our work on that and, frankly, the work of the Korean government recognizing our veterans as well, has been empowering for many of our veterans. I am sure next week members of the House will have the honour of providing 75th anniversary commemorative pins to veterans of World War II. These are important symbols that veterans like to have for Remembrance Week, to hand to their grandchildren, or as part of their family memory of service.

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We also recognized Bomber Command with a bar for the decorations. It was posthumous as well, so families could complete the service medal set of their grandparent by adding the Bomber Command bar. That was important because Bomber Command actually had the highest casualty rates of World War II, and the young men who flew on those missions were courageous. After the war, because of the nature of those missions, Bomber Command was not talked about, and the men were not properly recognized. There was a lovely exhibit in London, England, that many of those veterans attended, and the Bomber Command bar is a way we can commemorate that as well.

As I said in my remarks before in the House, when I brought up the important role the Legion plays in the care of our veterans, on a political program, I was mocked for that position. The only thing that predates the post-World War II bricks and mortar offices, is the Legion. Its network of 1,300 veteran services officers since the 1930s has been helping our veterans directly, and its mandate comes from an act of Parliament in 1926.

There are 14 recommendations from the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs on modernizing and evolving the new veterans charter. We have already acted on four of those, the most important of which is to make sure veterans are stable medically before they are transitioned out of the Canadian Armed Forces and to make sure they are briefed on Veterans Affairs and their caseworker.

I think most MPs would find that is usually the gap where a problem to the service or benefits of a veteran happens, because they leave one institution, the Canadian Armed Forces, which some joined at age 18, and they transition to an entirely new department. We are now making it mandatory that they are stable and they have the Veterans Affairs training.

The other parts of the recommendations we are reviewing and will act upon, because we are passionately committed to our veterans.

• (1145)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank this member for his service to our country, and for his continued service to our country as a member of Parliament.

He is right in many of the things he says, in particular about the ability of the all-party veterans affairs committee to get along and move forward to help veterans. We have all worked on that, and there was unanimous support.

I will be speaking shortly in this debate, and I hope the member will listen closely as I talk about some of the facts and figures he mentioned.

The member talked about the 700 service points, the 625-ish or so Service Canada points, where service is now available to veterans. I can speak to him later about a particular veteran who did not receive proper service at Service Canada in my riding. Could the member outline for the House, just very briefly, the sort of training that is going on in each of those Service Canada centres to ensure that veterans are getting the right service?

I understand there is about an hour and a half of video training that goes on in those service centres. Could the member either confirm

that or illustrate to us a little better what the training is for all of those employees in each of those service centres?

• (1150)

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I know the member's community was impacted as one of the nine centres where there was an office closure. He knows there is a Service Canada office nearby. In the case of Thunder Bay, I think it is about two kilometres away.

That is a good question. For those offices, and that one in particular, where there was a closure, there is a transferred Veterans Affairs caseworker who is fully knowledgeable and experienced in working specifically with veterans, including the demeanour and empathy required to help them on an administrative level.

As for the rest of the Service Canada network, that is a great question. The rest of the network has received what is considered level one training, which is training on the overview of veterans' benefits, the types of forms, and the types of queries that would come in on a daily basis. Most of the queries, about 80%, tend to be the same types of questions about benefits, including survivor benefits.

There is an intention to also do another level of training. I know that is being looked at, so that those caseworkers will have a good summary of the full body of knowledge to assist veterans when they go to a Service Canada office.

As I said in my remarks, veterans do not just have to live near a Veterans Affairs office. They can actually use the Service Canada offices or the 1,300 veteran service officers at the Legion. Their district Legion veteran service officer has a direct line of access into Veterans Affairs.

If anyone is falling through the cracks, we have to remedy that. This is about serving more and serving a wider cross-section.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad we are talking about this important issue as we come toward Remembrance Day.

I also looked at the report that was done by the veterans affairs committee, and I really want to congratulate the members on having a report that had the consensus of all parties.

The government, of course, responded to that report, and it is taking some immediate action on a number of the recommendations. It is also important to point out that some of the recommendations have a little more complexity, so it will take a little more work before we can actually move forward.

I would like the hon. member to talk about some of the action that has been taken already in terms of moving those important recommendations forward, and also a little about what the future is for some of the other recommendations.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the question. I know of her passion for our veterans and on these issues.

Routine Proceedings

As I said in my remarks, the report that came before the last session of Parliament ended, in the spring, produced 14 unanimous recommendations. Many of them are good ones. Many came from the more than 50 witnesses who appeared from across the country at the veterans affairs committee.

We have already moved on four of them. I spoke about the most important one, which is to make sure that a medical condition is stabilized and some basic veteran case management setup is done before someone is transitioned out of uniform.

However, there are other important ones. We have already indicated that we will move forward on adding a construction clause and bill of rights into the new veterans charter, in terms of a veterans bill of rights. We are already looking to harmonize the new veterans charter and SISIP and to do that better. That would eliminate some duplication and probably provide more benefits to more veterans.

Another important thing is that we will provide more direct financial support and training for home-based caregivers. These are usually the partners of the veterans. I have seen them first-hand, become the primary support both mentally and physically for veterans who are recovering. There will be more financial support for the families in that regard.

We have said, clearly, that we will review the disability award process to make sure it is robust and provides what is needed. The one thing that is often overlooked in terms of the disability award upfront is the fact that a lot of people do not talk about the suites of benefits that also follow, in some cases, for life. We have to look at the care of veterans over their lifetime. This is not comparing someone's situation to a workplace accident or a car accident. There is a suite of care for our veterans, so there is an upfront payment to help with that transition, but we have to look at the totality.

• (1155)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which I listened to with great intent.

What the public generally sees from the House of Commons and elected officials is the great deal of conflict that goes on between us. Some of it is feigned and some of it is quite sincere about different policy options and choices that the government makes and the opposition opposes, as is the nature of our system.

Around veterans, I would argue that there is a possibility to find more common ground more often than we have in the past, simply because we acknowledge, regardless of our political affiliations, the service that has been paid to this country by so many veterans over so many generations.

Our challenge is when the government comes forward with new policies, as it did with the veterans charter and others, in which it tries to apply a one-size-fits-all approach. We talked about the benefits and payments coming out as a lump sum, and many veterans resisted that. Many veterans told the government that at the committee. They said this is not a program that would work for them over the length of their disability.

What needs to happen is a little water in the wine when it comes to veterans' services from the government, to avoid the conflicts that

keep happening with veterans groups themselves. It is not from people in the opposition benches, but people who have gone through the veterans system, and people who have been pushed out of the military too early, before they could qualify for disability. We have had those cases, and the government is aware of them.

We need to improve this system. I think we can all agree on that and that it is not providing the full service that it could.

As we head toward Remembrance Day, this is a topic that needs to be a topic all year round. A concern that many veterans have come to me about regarding this new model of Service Canada treatment is whether, with the effects of PTSD—some of which are still unknown as we learn about the true injuries that happen that are not seen—we are always bringing people to that service who are qualified enough to handle the complexity of something like psychological disabilities. Are they qualified enough to handle injuries that have happened that are not perceived on the body but are having a huge and detrimental effect not only on the veteran, but on that veteran's family and community?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his intervention and for his suggestion. I do think there is more common ground. I think the veterans affairs committee demonstrated that.

Something that I will note is that even he fell into the mistake that some made when he talked about Service Canada and treatment at Service Canada for people. "Treatment" is the wrong word. It is not providing the front-line treatment, but is helping the veterans access the range of treatments.

Our veterans affairs committee heard from two veterans who I have known for many years and admire. Both happen to be from the member's province, British Columbia. They are Chris Linford and Tim Laidler. Both are involved in programs directed at operational stress injuries. Tim Laidler is at the Veterans Transition Network, and Chris Linford and his wife are running the COPE program, which is for families.

What our government has realized in recent years, particularly on mental health, is that there is not one single solution that fits the needs of all veterans. We are finding in some cases that they need the equine therapy that Can Praxis and others are offering, the Veterans Transition Network peer counselling, or the family-based COPE program. We need a variety of options for our veterans, and most of the time that is going outside of Veterans Affairs to providers in health care or in veterans' advocacy fields.

We have tried increasingly to fund these programs, either on a pilot or a permanent basis, to make sure there is a variety of programs to help the diverse needs of our veterans with mental health concerns.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be part of this debate today.

Routine Proceedings

The previous speakers have all been correct, including speakers on our side, that this was a unanimous report to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. The response was disappointing but not disappointing in all aspects. There were 14 recommendations and the government has indicated that it is already working on the majority of them and that it will come to some resolution in the future, perhaps the near future for some of them. However, the minister is not prepared to act on some of the recommendations and they all have a commonality, which I will talk about in a second.

There are recommendations in our report, and I say our report because I am a member of the veterans affairs committee, that would require, in some cases, a substantial increase in financial and human resources. I do not believe the government is right when it says that it can do these changes and meet these challenges within the existing budgets of veterans affairs.

I am going to outline four recommendations that the government is not prepared to act on or at least it says it will have further study on. The thing that is the same among all of them is that they will cost money. That is the commonality. The other recommendations are simply ways to cut some red tape and ensure there is some smooth transition, all good recommendations. We are pleased that the minister thinks that these recommendations can be acted upon fairly quickly. It is interesting to note that the recommendations that are going to be further studied all involve money.

We heard this morning one member of the government say that there is \$4.7 billion in extra spending. The member who just spoke talked about 800 million new dollars every year, which eventually comes to the \$4.7 billion. That is how the government comes up with that figure. I do have real figures from the ministry and I will talk about those in a second, too.

I will read the recommendations. Members will see the ones that the government is not prepared to act upon right now and they will see that they all involve money.

First, recommendation 3 is that the most seriously disabled veterans receive financial benefits for life of which an appropriate portion should be transferrable to his or her spouse in the event of death. Witnesses at committee felt that this was critical. The government is going to further study this particular recommendation.

Second, recommendation 4 concerns the earnings lost benefit, that it be non-taxable. There is some confusion here and I hope it is going to be sorted out by the ministry.

Third, recommendation 5 is that all veterans with service-related disabilities and their families be entitled to the same benefits and support as part of their rehabilitation program whether they are former members of the reserve force or the regular force. This is an important recommendation that we put forward in committee and the minister is going to study it but will not act on it right away.

Fourth, recommendation 6 is that the Canadian Forces work with Veterans Affairs Canada to make military family resource centres available to veterans and their families in order to support them in their transition to civilian life. I am not sure why this one needs more study but I suppose there are some funding issues, so money will be spent again.

If we keep in mind the figures that were thrown around a bit earlier, \$4.7 billion in new spending, and clarified further by the previous speaker as \$800 million a year, which adds up to \$4.7 billion. Here are the actual numbers, and I have two sets of numbers here.

Let me talk about the nine service branches that were closed. They were located in Charlottetown, Corner Brook, Sydney, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Kelowna, Prince George, Saskatoon and Brandon. I will not go through all the figures on how much those offices cost over the last number of years but it ranges for all of those offices altogether. Let me talk about Thunder Bay in particular and it will give members an idea.

● (1200)

The Thunder Bay branch comes in around the \$650,000 range a year to run. Therefore, we are talking about a considerable amount of money for these offices if we extrapolate that amount with the others.

By the way, I do not have figures for Prince George, because those numbers were not specific and were sort of spread out over the province. However, I do have figures for the rest of them, which I will talk about. For example, in 2013, it took \$156,000 to keep the Brandon office open. However, the most expensive one was just a little over \$1 million, which was in Sydney.

There was considerable expense involved for these offices, but I was concerned when they were closed. Previous members mentioned that veterans now have 600 and some odd points of service instead, but I did have a question on training and I remain concerned about that.

We have a further list of allotments and expenditures for Veterans Affairs each year, from 2004 to the end of 2013. However, I had also asked what the amount and percentage of all lapsed spending was in the department, broken down over those years, which is very enlightening. While we are talking about these four recommendations that I outlined, which would all cost money to Veterans Affairs, it is interesting to see the money that was lapsed. I would like to go through the years, starting in 2006.

The total allotment in 2006 in Veterans Affairs was \$3.2 billion. However, the actual expenditure in that fiscal year was \$3 billion. In other words, 8.21% of the money allotted to Veterans Affairs was left unspent, which amounts to \$270 million that was lapsed and given back to the government.

When we talk about closing offices and changing the way things are done in Veterans Affairs, I think it is curious to note how much money was lapsed and given back to the government in each of these years.

In 2007-08, the allotment was \$3.4 billion for Veterans Affairs, and almost \$3.2 billion was actually spent in that fiscal year. Therefore, \$246 million lapsed in that year from Veterans Affairs. It was left unspent and ended up going back into the government kitty. In 2008-09, the allotment was \$3.4 billion, and \$3.3 billion was actually spent, of which \$115 million was lapsed and given back to the government in that year.

Routine Proceedings

In 2009-10, the allotment was \$3.5 billion, and \$3.4 billion was actually spent. There was a lapsed spending amount of \$118 million in that fiscal year that was given back to the government. In 2010-11, the allotment was \$3.5 billion. The expenditures were actually close to that amount and the lapsed spending amount in 2010-11 was \$41 million, which was sent back to the government.

In 2011-12, the allotment was \$3.6 billion. Almost \$3.5 billion was actually spent with \$171 million that was lapsed and given back to the government. In 2012-13, the allotment was \$3.6 billion, and \$3.48 billion was actually spent. In that year, which is the last year I have figures for as we do not have the new ones yet, the lapsed spending amount was \$172 million.

● (1205)

If we extrapolate for this year, we can assume, particularly with the way the government has put lapsed money in all sorts of departments and put it back into the kitty to try to meet whatever its deadlines are to reduce the amount of money that Canadians owe, if we add these up, the lapsed spending since the government took power from Veterans Affairs is in excess of \$1 billion.

Over that course of time there was a certain amount of money allotted each year to Veterans Affairs. Money was spent, and the money that was left over the course of the government's tenure so far is in excess of \$1 billion given back to the government.

When we talk about closing offices and cutting corners in other areas, it seems pretty clear to me that the argument the government uses of trying to get down the deficit, and so on, is being done, in Veterans Affairs and perhaps in other departments, on the backs of some veterans and perhaps with money that needs to be spent on veterans.

The other thing I would point out is the allotments, and perhaps it is also important to talk about the expenditures for this year. The exact numbers, the actual allotment for 2006 and 2007 was \$3,298,686,739. I would call that \$3.3 billion, just as a round figure. There were some various increases each year, and these are the government figures, by the way. These figures are signed off by the parliamentary secretary and the minister. It is interesting that in 2013, the actual allotment was \$3.6 billion to \$3.7 billion.

We are looking at an increase, and we could be generous, if I do some quick calculating, of under \$400 million, which has been the increase over these years. It is important to point out that there has been an increase over the years, but the increase is not nearly as much as the government members who have been speaking today seem to think it is. Therefore, we are looking at a little less than a \$400 million increase from 2006-07 through 2012-13.

Let me remind the House and those who may be watching at home that today we have heard from government members that there is \$4.7 billion in new funding. They will see that does not really make much sense, because the most that has ever been spent in the allotments was in 2011-12, when \$3.5 billion was spent by Veterans Affairs. I fail to see where the \$4.7 billion in new funding is. If the government is pretty clear on that number of \$4.7 billion in new funding, we should be looking at this fiscal year of expenditures over the course of the years as somewhere in the neighbourhood of over

\$8 billion that Veterans Affairs has spent. The numbers do not bear that out.

The previous member who spoke talked about \$800 million a year in extra funding. Let me just indicate what the ministry has sent me in terms of actual numbers. In 2006-07, \$3.3 billion was the allotment. Less was spent. In 2007-08, \$3.4 billion was allotted. Again, money was lapsed. In 2008-09, \$3.4 billion was allotted. In 2009-10, \$3.5 billion was the allotment. In 2010-11, \$3.5 billion was the allotment. In 2011-12, \$3.6 billion was the allotment, and 2012-13, it was \$3.6 billion. Again, that was actually a little less than it was in the previous year of 2011-12.

● (1210)

There are two things in play here. One is that the numbers do not make any sense. In fact, there has never actually been, in any year, \$4.7 billion in old funding, much less \$4.7 billion in new funding in any given year. I stand to be corrected if the government can explain to this House and to Canadians where that \$4.7 billion in new funding is.

I suppose that if I wanted to be generous, I could suggest that maybe it came from other departments and was not actually spent by Veterans Affairs. I think it would certainly be beneficial for all of us and for all Canadians to know exactly where that money came from if, in fact, that is the case when we talk about \$4.7 billion.

I think it was important to stand to refute those numbers. Again I emphasize that the numbers I am using come directly from the Veterans Affairs ministry.

It is more important for the discussions here to be talking about recommendations put forward by the committee. Other speakers are absolutely right that it was a unanimous report, and all of us understand that the new veterans charter is a living document that we need to continue to improve. One of our mandates in Veterans Affairs will be to continue looking at the new veterans charter and ways to improve it.

However, when we look at those four recommendations that I outlined at the beginning of my speech, we see that they are all the ones that require financial commitments from the government. They are all recommendations that require the government to spend money.

I cannot emphasize this point enough. The lapsed spending in each of these years when the money went back into the government kitty from Veterans Affairs amounts to over \$1 billion from 2006 to 2013. As I said, we do not know yet about 2014, but that will add to the total. I am sure that money has been lapsed again, unless the government thinks that it suddenly spent \$4.7 billion in 2014. That remains to be seen. We shall see in due course whether that is correct.

Routine Proceedings

Clearly it is unfair of the government to suggest that there is no money and that the recommendations that cost money require further study and another look before the money is spent. The reality is that money was left unspent every year in Veterans Affairs and went back into the general coffers.

I would urge the minister to look again at these recommendations in question. He perhaps could speak to his parliamentary secretary and others involved in the ministry and say, "Listen, it's pretty clear that we did give money back every year from Veterans Affairs and that it went into the general kitty. Surely we can work on these recommendations."

These were unanimous recommendations, all-party recommendations, and when we are dealing with veterans and their families, it is obviously critical that these things not get delayed.

What we are left with is that the recommendations from the report will be looked at again and studied at a later date. We know that 2015 is just around the corner, so I have to ask when this will be done. When will decisions be made? Will it be before the next election?

We know the next election will be in October of 2015 and perhaps even sooner. Who knows? My fear is that these very valuable recommendations that we in the committee put forward and that all parties agreed upon unanimously will not be dealt with before the next election. I certainly hope they will be.

• (1215)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member speak yesterday about how his grandfathers both participated in the war effort in different ways. I spoke earlier today about my two grandfathers, both veterans as well.

When I was on the national defence committee, we had a study on the care of the ill and injured soldier. We heard from Dr. Alice Aiken. I understand she also met with the veterans affairs committee as a representative of a different organization, but when we heard from her, it was as the director of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research. At that time, she indicated, based on a comprehensive study the institute had done, that 99% of veterans were probably better off financially under the new veterans charter than under the old disability pension system.

Obviously the 1% who do not find themselves in that category would have a great concern, but she indicated that her research said veterans were better off under this system. Perhaps that is why the NDP, the Liberals, and the Conservatives unanimously endorsed the new veterans charter when it was tabled in the House. It was a Liberal project that was enacted under our government.

I am hoping the hon. member could address the point that an independent analysis shows that 99% of veterans are better off under the new veterans charter. Does he not agree that it is a great basis to work on going forward, and that we can make improvements to make sure that we get that—

• (1220)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is absolutely right. There certainly have been improvements, and when we look at what veterans need in our country, we can see that over the years it is very different. As a previous member pointed out in his speech, it is very different from what it was 50 or 60 years ago, and it is more complicated.

If I understand the question from the member correctly, he is referring to the lump sum payment. I do not know if that is exactly what he is referring to, but one of the things we recommended was that an either-or approach is better. Let us give veterans a choice. Offering a lump sum payment or money monthly or yearly for life is one of the important things. That was one of the concerns brought to our committee by a number of veterans, and it certainly was addressed.

Do not get me wrong: we have made improvements. However, I am concerned about those things that I outlined earlier.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate this morning with very keen interest. I am hearing a lot of numbers thrown around about how we have done this or that and have spent more money than in the history of universe on one subject or another, but my colleague brought up the very interesting fact that some of this money has not been spent.

Whether it is a lump sum payment or a series of payments, what I am hearing from veterans is more about the access to care that is available to them, particularly when dealing with PTSD. Veterans are not getting that service. They are not getting the help they need. I do not think any amount of money in their pockets is going to help if they are not able to function. I wonder if my colleague would care to comment on the lack of availability of services for our veterans, especially in health care.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a concern as we talk about PTSD. Fifty or 60 years ago, it was not even a conversation that was going on in our country.

Part of the problem, and the reason we are so concerned on the veterans affairs committee and so concerned about the ministry as it moves forward, is that people will fall through the cracks. Many veterans will not access veterans affairs services for 10, 15, 20, or 30 years. Perhaps they ignore warning signs that they may be suffering from PTSD and will need services in the future. That is why it is critical for veterans affairs to have the tools and financing it needs to ensure that no one falls through the cracks and everyone has an opportunity to access services.

That is why I would like to ask for unanimous consent to table the responses by the government, signed by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and tabled March 2014 in both official languages, to my order paper questions Q-171 and Q-173. These are figures I have been looking at and talking about in the House. I am hoping we could find unanimous consent to do that.

• (1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Routine Proceedings

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous question is totally false. I come from an RCMP background. I utilize Veterans Affairs services all the time. I have PTSD, so I know what is available, but I hear individuals up here trying to talk as though they know something about what people experience with PTSD and the services available through Veterans Affairs.

We are seeing an amalgamation of services whereby Veterans Affairs is now available over the entire country. I come from northern Saskatchewan, and the nearest Veterans Affairs office was in Saskatoon. Now we have availability in northern Saskatchewan, either in La Ronge or in Meadow Lake.

When I make a phone call to Veterans Affairs, someone picks up the phone and asks if I am okay. Then the person asks what service I need. At times I ask for someone for counselling, and that is available. I just wonder if my colleague across the aisle realizes how easy it is to pick up the phone and dial the number for Veterans Affairs. Has he ever tried picking up the phone and phoning Veterans Affairs himself?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, in answer to that question, let me just relate a recent case in Thunder Bay.

As members know, that office has been closed. There was a Second World War veteran who went to Service Canada. He stood in line for a fairly lengthy time. When he finally got to the person who was going to help him, her only response was, "There's nothing we can do for you here. Why don't you talk to your local Legion?"

That story is horrendous. I would like to think that story is not repeated across the country. We heard from a previous speaker that after the nine offices were closed, there were dedicated Veterans Affairs staff, one from each of those offices, who moved into the Service Canada points. However, that is nine service points.

My concern is that the government is not going to follow through on proper training for at least one point person in each of those Service Canada offices to ensure that the services are there. When veterans wait in line and are told to go talk to their local Legion if they need some financial help, there is something wrong.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Thunder Bay for his story. I also thank the previous Conservative member and former RCMP individual for his comment.

We have had a number of people through my office and in my experience who have come out of the RCMP in particular and have long been advocating for some sort of equal understanding and acknowledgement that the services that the police and emergency services have provided on our behalf sometimes result in some of the same injuries that have been happening among our veterans.

To this point, the transition from the Veterans Affairs offices to these Service Canada outlets where we go to register different licences that we need through the federal government or to apply for employment insurance does not seem to be going well. The front-line people those veterans meet in those offices do not yet seem to be trained in doing proper referrals, and these are sensitive issues.

My question for my friend is this. With such a sensitive topic as this, did the government seem to have a coherent plan for serving our veterans and getting them the services and referrals they need when it was shutting those Veterans Affairs offices and moving to the Service Canada model?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, that is what the concern is. For many Canadians, the closing of these offices came out of the blue. The concern that one naturally has is about the transition. On one hand, the Conservatives say that we now have 600-odd service points and it is even easier for veterans to access services, or so they say.

However, it appears to me from speaking to veterans that the transition has not been good. I have to ask the government when the transition to the point where everybody is knowledgeable in these service centres will happen. Also, is the money coming out of a different account? Members have heard my own description of the accounts.

• (1230)

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to have an opportunity to stand in this House and deliver my remarks.

Before I deliver my remarks on this particular motion, I want to say that it is a very significant day today in the Sikh community. It is the birthday of one of our gurus, Guru Nanak Dev Ji. I want to take this opportunity to offer best wishes to every single Sikh around the world who is celebrating the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and some of his teachings. The first one is to always remember God throughout the day. The second one is to earn a livelihood through hard work and honest means, and the third one is to selflessly serve and share with others, especially the ones who are less fortunate than oneself.

Obviously, I belong to the Sikh religion. I am a proud Sikh, and once again, I want to offer best wishes to every single Sikh around the world who is celebrating the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

As I mentioned, I appreciate the opportunity to join in this important debate today. One of the great honours in my life, as I mentioned, is the opportunity to rise in this House and provide my input in the heart of this country's democracy. In so many ways, this place represents what generations of courageous Canadians have served to defend.

I am also extremely proud to be part of a government that has demonstrated, at every turn, its deepest and most profound commitment to the men and women and families who have served our country and who continue to do so today.

I am also proud to have served on the veterans affairs committee and to have played a role in this remarkable, unanimous committee report that was put forward by the committee. Members from all different parties played an important role. Few committees are able to arrive at a unanimous recommendation or unanimous report. The bipartisan nature of this committee is a remarkable demonstration of respect for our veterans. I encourage all members to check their politics at the door when dealing with this issue. Our veterans deserve far better. As our committee led the way in a bipartisan manner, I encourage everyone here to follow suit.

Routine Proceedings

I have said this a number of times, but it is worth repeating. I have had the distinct honour and privilege of meeting and working alongside many remarkable Canadian veterans and serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Each time, I have been impressed by the passion and honour with which they have worn our nation's uniform.

I am proud of every opportunity I get to pay tribute to their extraordinary service and sacrifice, because I have seen for myself some of the things they have done for our country. I have seen how dedicated, professional, and courageous our Canadian men and women have been in defending our great country and the values we all hold dear.

Sadly, I have also seen the devastating impact their service can have on them and their loved ones. I am painfully aware of how their lives, and the lives of their families, can be forever changed in a heartbeat. In these tragic instances, I have been humbled and inspired by their commitment and determination to rise above the challenges they face. They are truly Canadian heroes.

Our government is equally committed to our mission to provide exemplary service to Canadian veterans and their families.

• (1235)

Our government believes that legislation related to veterans programming should be clear and consistent with respect to our commitment to these brave men and women and their families. We want to ensure that we provide the best support possible, the best care, and the best programs for those who have been injured in service to Canada. That is why we believe that the most seriously injured veterans, whether they are regular force members or reservists, should receive the monthly financial benefits they need to support them and their families. That is why we believe that injured veterans should only leave the military when rehabilitation professionals have been identified to support them in civilian life and when they have medically stabilized from their injuries.

We believe that families of veterans with operational stress injuries should receive caregiver training and that more psychological support should be provided. We believe that veterans and their families deserve less red tape as they are making the transition between National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

Those are just some of the fundamental principles that guide our government in everything we do to enhance the veterans benefits, services, and programs we provide.

As all members of the House know, one of the first decisions made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs last year was to ask for a comprehensive parliamentary review of the new veterans charter. The new veterans charter, which was passed unanimously by Parliament in 2005, is a modern approach to ensuring that veterans and their families have the support they need, when they need it.

As part of this comprehensive review, the minister specifically asked the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to study, number one, how Canada cares for its most seriously injured veterans; number two, how it supports their families; and number three, how the department delivers its programs. The minister later asked the committee to expand its mandate and to recommend the best way for Canada, as a nation, to express its commitment to current and future

veterans. The members of the parliamentary committee accepted their mission with great enthusiasm. One of the first conclusions they reached was that the new veterans charter is providing a sound foundation upon which to support those who have served our country, both at home and abroad.

For the record, I want to again read what was written in the introduction of the report entitled, "The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward". It states:

The Committee members unanimously agree that the principles of the NVC should be upheld and that these principles foster an approach that is well suited to today's veterans.

Our commitment echoed the findings of a similar report from the other chamber last year, when members of the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs also concluded that the new veterans charter is serving the majority of Canadian Armed Forces personnel and veterans well.

Quite frankly, I believe that these two reports have laid to rest any debate about turning back the clock. The new veterans charter was and remains the right approach for serving and supporting Canada's veterans. That is not to say that it is perfect or that it cannot be improved. Of course it can.

• (1240)

As the Prime Minister said when we implemented the new veterans charter in April of 2006, and as previous ministers in this portfolio have also repeated over the years, we consider the new veterans charter a living document. It is meant to evolve with the complex and diverse needs of those who serve.

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs developed a series of unanimous recommendations on how we can continue to enhance the new veterans charter. The government's response was a sincere effort to move the yardstick forward. Our report offers a common path forward. As the House is aware, our government has tabled its formal response to that report. It was clear and unequivocal in its response, which I will repeat here. It stated:

We will indeed move forward immediately with several initiatives as we continue to improve veterans benefits and services while consultations are undertaken with the Veterans Ombudsman and veterans stakeholders on the more complex proposals.

Let there be no mistake. We are saying that we agree with the spirit and intent of the vast majority of the committee's recommendations.

Our formal response also outlines our plan to address those recommendations through a phased approach. Our government understands and accepts that we have no greater responsibility than to care for and support our injured Canadian veterans and serving members and their families. That is why we will leave no stone unturned as we continue to find innovative new ways to build upon the almost \$4.7 billion in additional funding we have already invested in veterans programming since 2006. We will move forward immediately with improvements to help veterans and their families and to improve the continuum of care for those military members who are making the transition to civilian life.

Routine Proceedings

The transition is tough for anyone. That is why we are going to make changes to make the transition smoother for injured veterans and their family members. We will also change our way of doing business to ensure that those who are medically released can be assigned a VAC case manager and assisted earlier in the process by someone from Veterans Affairs. We are determined to reduce the uncertainty in the transition process. In the first phase of our plan, we are determined to help veterans and their families focus on themselves, their well-being, and their quality of life.

The second part of our plan consists of closely examining the more complex recommendations of the committee that require further work and consultation. Throughout this phased approach, we will strive to update this House, veterans, and all Canadians on how the implementation is going.

We are building on a record and the investments we have made to date. Our government is committed to making the ongoing improvements that are needed. While we have made substantial investments in veterans programming since 2006, we agree that more can and must be done. Our government's formal response to the veterans affairs committee's report is by no means a final destination. It is the continuation of a steadfast and ongoing effort. That is why I expect that we will have more good news and more significant improvements to announce in the coming weeks and months. We will keep moving forward and taking positive steps to improve what we do for veterans and their families.

• (1245)

We are on the right track. We have taken further steps in the right direction. For this, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for their important and invaluable contributions. I also want to thank all those who participated in the parliamentary review: the many members of our veterans committee, their families, the ombudsman, the various veterans organizations and the individual Canadians who wanted to voice their gratitude and support for our men and women in uniform, both past and present.

Together we have moved the yardsticks forward. Together we will keep delivering for the men, women and families who have earned their place among our nation's truest heroes. They deserve our unending gratitude and our unwavering support, and they will always have it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the questions we have faced today, as we talk about veterans and veterans services, is the transition that the government took veterans through with, in this case, no consultation at all. It was not a surprise to everybody, every veterans group and every veteran, when the government decided to close down veterans offices across Canada, offices that specialized in services for veterans, which I think we can all agree have become increasingly complex. The veteran services of 50 or 60 years ago have become more complicated and more complex because the issues that veterans face have become more complicated than they were a generation or two past.

However, when the transition came, the government trotted out the idea of more points of service at Service Canada outlets in malls in various communities across the country. There are more of them,

but our question is whether veterans will receive better service, which is the entire point of any initiative if the government makes that claim.

The lack of training for the veterans service staff, because they were not from veterans services, they were meant to guide veterans to different places, was of great concern to us. The veteran walking in the door may be facing a number of barriers just to get to that point in the first place, particularly if the individual is dealing with an issue like PTSD, or any multi-faceted issue.

Would the government now admit that the transition from one specialized service centre this very broad centre that was not could have been done better, and still needs to be improved from what we see today in servicing our veterans across Canada?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I would like to point out that our government has a strong record when it comes to investing and providing benefits and services for Canada's veterans, because we appreciate the sacrifices they and their families have made, and the men and women in uniform continue to make. We have invested \$4.7 billion, as I pointed out in my remarks, in additional funding because we believe veterans deserve those benefits and those services.

With regard to the office closures, we have to understand that most of these offices were used very little. Some of them had possibly two or three people show up throughout a day. The six centre points of service in Service Canada locations now provide assistance throughout the country.

For example, the riding I represent in Brampton did not have a district office. Veterans in many cities, neighbourhoods and regions had no district office. Where did they go before? They did not drive to a district office closest to them. They called Veterans Affairs Canada whereas now they have access to a Service Canada location where they can go and receive the necessary service.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question in regard to mental health. We all know that many veterans coming from some form of engagement will return to Canada not only with physical injuries, but also mental stress and often require some psychological assistance. We have found the government wanting in providing the necessary services to meet that need. I mentioned in my speech that we had concerns related to everything from suicides to family issues, divorces, children and so forth.

By not having those vacant positions filled, to what degree is that having a negative impact in providing the mental health services that our vets need today?

Routine Proceedings

• (1250)

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, anyone who goes through any sort of mental health issue, whether they are a veteran, a still-serving member of the Canadian Armed Forces, or a Canadian, needs support. The individuals deserve the medical attention they require. Our government has made investments in those areas as well.

Let me point out that 17 operational stress injury clinics have been established across Canada to support mental health conditions. There are 24 integrated personnel support centres where, for the first time, Veterans Affairs and national defence employees work hand-in-hand to support Canada's men and women in uniform.

We will continue to stand up for Canada's veterans.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs on the way in which he gave a very clear description and definition of the number of initiatives that our government had enacted to provide enhanced and more readily available services to our veterans.

In my riding of Richmond Hill, prior to our changes, veterans would have to travel considerably outside of the riding and the great town of Richmond Hill to avail themselves of the much needed service. Today, they are able to get service right in Richmond Hill at a Service Canada location.

I appreciate the tone of the member's presentation, in which he welcomed the participation of all members of Parliament on the committee in coming up with an excellent document. Could he share with us what he has heard from veterans across the country with respect to this improved level of service that has now become a matter of fact from coast to coast to coast in our great country?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Richmond Hill for all of his hard work on this file as well, for serving veterans in his area. I can always count on his co-operation on this file.

As he pointed out, there are many regions, cities and towns where a district office does not exist. The veterans in those areas now have access to the service centres. They can walk in and they can receive the basic information they need, whether it is a form or so on.

The member opposite asked a question on this issue as well and said that the staff in those offices had not received the proper training. I would like to point out that, yes, they have.

To top it off, we also placed a fully experienced Veterans Affairs Canada employee in the Service Canada location, whether it was in the same building where the district office was or the closest to it. In most cases, the Service Canada location was located in the same building where the district office used to be. It only made sense.

Veterans can count on this government to provide the necessary help, support and benefits they deserve. We will continue to stand up for veterans.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is really important to have the right number here when we talk about an issue such as veterans. It is really sad to see

the federal government is cutting services for veterans, even as it ramps up spending on the publicity program to honour them.

It is really important to honour them, but when the government increases the remember program by 21% at the same time that it cuts disability and death compensation, health care programs and re-establishment service by 4%, it is a shame. It is not the way we can congratulate and honour the soldiers, the men and women, who put their lives on the line. They wanted to do so even at the sacrifice of their health and their life.

It is hypocritical of the government to spend so much money on publicity and less and less money on taking care of our veterans.

• (1255)

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of the comment. It was full of misinformation. Since coming to office, we have spent almost \$30 billion in Veterans Affairs Canada and that is \$4.7 billion in additional funds.

When my colleagues in the opposition talk about cuts to Veterans Affairs and this and that, and spread misinformation, I would like to remind them, especially at this time of the year, to not play politics with Canada's veterans. They deserve far better.

Why do opposition members only remember Canada's veterans in the week leading up to Remembrance Day? They are asleep at the switch throughout the remainder of the year. If they really care for Canada's veterans, I would encourage them to get onboard, help this government provide the benefits and support that veterans need, and stop playing politics.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

As the House knows, we are debating a concurrence motion regarding the new veterans charter and the changes that are absolutely essential for veterans today. Veterans deserve far more than ceremonial recognition.

I am most grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important debate concerning some very remarkable citizens of this country. They are indeed remarkable citizens, because collectively they took and take citizenship very seriously. They proved their commitment to Canada through their service in the Canadian Forces.

When our country was in danger during World War I and World War II; or when our country called upon Canadians to be peacekeepers in faraway places like Lebanon, Bosnia, Somalia, Cyprus, East Timor, Suez, and Afghanistan; or when they were sent to serve in NATO; or when our country asked them to stand on guard here at home or to help communities jeopardized by floods, earthquakes, ice storms, and forest fires, they did not hesitate.

Routine Proceedings

As we have seen with Corporal Nathan Cirillo and Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, some paid with their lives. They did what they were asked to do. They did their duty in world wars, in Korea, at home, and in multiple deployments since.

In the course of duty, our country made a contract with them, a covenant. Canada made promises that the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces would not be forgotten or abandoned. Our governments made and continue to make promises assuring these men and women that they will be remembered and honoured by a grateful nation. That is a wonderful sentiment.

I know without a shadow of doubt that the people of Canada are grateful and that they do remember and truly honour our service men and women in the Canadian Forces and the RCMP. I see it every day from my constituents in London—Fanshawe.

Sadly, however, it has become painfully obvious that our government neither honours our veterans, peacekeepers, or those currently serving nor is it willing to provide the services, pensions, programs, and special care to which these veterans and members of the Armed Forces and RCMP and their families are entitled. That is what the report of the veterans committee is about.

The committee made 14 recommendations for important changes that are long overdue. As one veteran said:

...there should be more presumptions in the system, and I don't mean that in a legalistic way. If I come to you as a double-leg amputee...I shouldn't have to do much more than that. I should just simply say, "Look, I'm a double-leg amputee. What have you got for me?"

The point is that the wounds in service are obvious. The obligation to provide care and support in a respectful manner should also be obvious.

The Conservative government likes to tout the "support our troops" line, but the minute those troops become veterans, they are all but forgotten.

A case in point is the government's lump sum payment plan for injured veterans. The lump sum plan, for the most part, has proven to be a failure. In some cases, injured vets get only 10% of what they would have received through the courts or workers' compensation. Imagine, after risking everything for one's country, having to fight the government in court to get a fair pension.

I asked the minister a year ago when the Conservatives planned to change the lump sum formula to ensure that veterans received the pensions they deserve. His answer did not address the issue. He did not seem to appreciate that some veterans receive less than what they would on workers' compensation.

Another glaring example of how veterans are abandoned is the government's phasing out of access to long-term care beds for modern veterans. These veterans are people with special needs and requirements for their care.

New Democrats are advocating that the federal government continue the veterans long-term care program. Currently, World War II and Korean vets are eligible for a dedicated departmental contract bed or priority beds in veteran hospital wings like Parkwood Hospital in London, Ontario; Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto; and

Camp Hill in Halifax, Nova Scotia; or approved provincial community care facilities if they meet certain criteria.

This program will cease when the last World War II or Korean War vet passes away, and the Conservative government has no intention to open access up to CF and RCMP veterans.

● (1300)

This means that veterans will no longer have priority access to departmental contract beds and will compete with the civilian population for access to long-term care in provincial community care facilities.

Unlike the minister, New Democrats continue to advocate that the federal government has a responsibility for long-term care for our veterans, in recognition of those who accept the unlimited liability of service in the Armed Forces.

The NDP proposes that veterans have access to veterans' hospitals and wards throughout Canada, staffed with health care professionals experienced in the dedicated and exclusive treatment of injured veterans.

Obviously, the minister is not getting the message and people are suffering, people like retired veteran Air Force Colonel Neil Russell, who is confined to a wheelchair. He cannot return home and he was callously denied a long-term care bed at Parkwood Hospital, in London. It is ludicrous, because Neil would have been on the street because there was a two-year waiting list for a nursing home bed.

After many letters to the minister and media pressure, Colonel Russell was told he had a bed. Sadly, within a few days, the Colonel was then told he did not have a bed and was informed he had simply misunderstood and was given a provincial contract bed, for which he has to pay.

I would like to remind the minister that veterans are a federal responsibility, not a provincial responsibility. They served our country and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Ensuring that they have access to the long-term care they require is the very least we can do.

What we urgently need is an overhaul of the way Veterans Affairs Canada administers health and disability benefits for CF and RCMP veterans. Too many veterans spend years caught up in the system of bureaucratic red tape, trying to prove they have a disability related to their service years.

Routine Proceedings

Veterans, and those who support them, want programs that evolve with their needs. Many veterans cannot access the veterans' independence program because their health condition in later years is not linked to a specific war- or service-related event. We absolutely must tailor these programs so that they evolve with the changing requirements of veterans. More help is also needed to support veterans and their families struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Today, in Canada, we know that some veterans are turning to food banks and homeless shelters for assistance. It is unknown how many veterans access food banks across the country, because our veterans are proud; they do not talk about it. They have done their duty for this country, yet we know a recent report from the national association of food banks tells us that food bank services are now more than ever utilized by children, seniors, and veterans.

We also know that there are more and more homeless veterans seeking shelter, couch surfing, or even living rough outside of our communities—the very communities they served and protected.

This is a national shame and a direct failure of the federal government and the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide immediate help to those who served our country.

I would like to remind the House that, when in opposition, the Conservatives promised they would make significant veterans reforms, but none of these have been implemented.

Just as the current government has ignored the veterans affairs committee report, so too has it forgotten our veterans and the contribution of modern-day Canadian Forces veterans and RCMP members who served in peacekeeping around the world. That is absolutely unacceptable. It is a travesty, and it is a crisis in this country.

Canadians are very passionate about their pride in and gratitude for veterans. During Remembrance Week and beyond, Canadians choose to honour the men and women who gave us a strong and free country. It is long past time for our federal government to likewise honour all veterans, both past and present, by serving their needs.

Monuments and parades are important, but they are cold comfort to the veterans and families who are neglected and suffering.

It is time to mean what we say when we repeat the promise to remember. Let us truly remember. Let us see the 14 recommendations of the veterans affairs committee implemented and implemented immediately.

● (1305)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we defer the vote until the end of government orders on Monday, November 17.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The vote stands deferred until that time.

The House will now resume with the remaining business under routine proceedings. We are under the rubric of motions.

The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I intend to move that the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House, be concurred in.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

PENSIONS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, petitions calling on the government to retain defined benefit pension plans.

Retirees from coast to coast to coast have delivered literally hundreds of these petitions to my office, asking the government to please stick with the program they have had, rather than move to something that would reduce benefits by way of what they term “shared risk plans”, stripping pension benefits and legal protections from so many employees.

[*Translation*]

CAP-DES-ROSIERS LIGHTHOUSE

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today signed by hundreds of my constituents, who are calling on the federal government to invest in the Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse. This lighthouse was designated a historic site in 1974.

Unfortunately, the government is now trying to sell the lighthouse to a third party, but there are no takers. The government must help preserve this lighthouse, which sits at the entrance to Forillon Park and is the tallest lighthouse in Canada.

I hope that the government is listening.

Government Orders

[English]

PALESTINE

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. The first is on behalf of my constituents in Newton—North Delta who call on this government to support the initiative of Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish to bring injured Palestinian children from Gaza to Canada for treatment.

Dr. Abuelaish's unifying message of reconciliation is an example to us all. He believes that to achieve peace, we must refuse to hate.

I want to thank my constituents. I am always honoured to represent their voices in this House.

• (1310)

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, once again on behalf of my constituents in Newton—North Delta, is calling on the Government of Canada to change the current drinking and driving laws.

The petitioners want to implement mandatory minimum sentences for persons convicted of impaired driving causing death.

[Translation]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions regarding the creation of a legal ombudsman mechanism for responsible mining. This ombudsman could receive and analyze complaints, as well as assess international social responsibility standards with respect to labour, the environment and human rights.

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present, signed by many of my constituents, regarding many aboriginal girls and women who have been murdered or gone missing. It says that, in many ways, the system designed to protect them has actually failed them.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to heed the call for a national public inquiry that would study the high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

PALESTINE

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition signed by my constituents of Surrey North.

The petitioners ask the government to support the initiative by Dr. Abuelaish to bring injured Palestinian children from Gaza to Canada for treatment. They call on the government to take immediate action to enable Dr. Abuelaish's humanitarian initiative.

CANADA POST

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions today on the same subject.

One is signed by hundreds of my constituents in the cities of both Burnaby and New Westminster.

The other is signed by hundreds of British Columbians living in Conservative-held ridings: Langley, Maple Ridge, particularly in the Fraser Valley and the eastern part of the Lower Mainland in British Columbia.

In the case of both petitions, these Canadians are asking the government to take action to reverse the cuts in services announced by Canada Post, which would lead to the loss of thousands of jobs right across the country and hardships for seniors particularly and people with disabilities and small businesses right across the country. My constituents and the constituents of Conservative MPs in the eastern Fraser Valley are also saying it is important to bring innovation to Canada Post. They call upon the government to reverse the cuts and bring the kind of innovation that has led, in so many other countries, to public postal service that is expanding.

* * *

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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

NÁÁTS'IHCH'OH NATIONAL PARK RESERVE ACT

The House resumed from October 23 consideration of the motion that Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve of Canada), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise to speak to Bill S-5, the Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve Act.

[English]

New Democrats, in principle, support the creation of new national parks and the conservation of key ecosystems and habitat. We are glad to support the bill.

However, often politicians make their decisions based on politics. When we are looking at conservation issues, when we are looking at ecology, political boundaries do not always mesh with ecological boundaries. They are two different things. Perhaps a better way to look at planning parks and planning our ecological future would be to pay more attention to ecological boundaries.

Government Orders

My background is in landscape architecture. Before I was a politician, I was a professional landscape architect. We learned all scales of landscape planning, from the backyard of someone's house all the way to regions and regional planning. The bill is something that is very close to what I used to do, and I can see there are weaknesses in the bill. One of the things that we learned as landscape architects is that rather than a political unit for planning ecologically, the watershed should be the essential unit that is used for landscape planning.

What I am going to talk about is two great figures in the field of ecological planning. I am sure that when this was sent to Parks Canada, when the planners working with Parks Canada were looking at establishing this national park, they used some of the methods that are outlined by the two great figures in ecological planning.

One is Fritz Steiner, from the University of Texas. The second one would be Richard Forman from Harvard University. Steiner's planning method has 11 steps. The reason I am going to be talking about the 11 steps of Steiner's planning method is that I am going to go stage by stage through the planning process, and explain what went wrong during the planning of this park and how the government was not vigilant enough or perhaps, more skeptically, how the government might not have honoured the planning process properly in developing this park.

The first step of the planning method is to identify planning problems and opportunities. From looking at the end result in the bill, I suspect that the government identified the issue as mining versus the ecological system. It pitted these two things against each other, asking how it could promote mining in the area while balancing it with ecological protection.

The second step of the planning is that the stakeholder establishes goals. Again, the end result here shows that the government's objective was probably to maximize mining potential in the area rather than to have an equilibrium between the ecological systems and mining. I suspect that because what the government came up with at the end of the process was an area much smaller than what was asked for.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth steps are all scientific steps. A regional landscape analysis is done, a local landscape analysis is done, detailed studies are done, and planning area concepts are developed, all for the final step of preparing the landscape plan.

What the government did was that it presented three options: a large park that preserved key ecological areas, a more medium-sized park that sort of balanced the two, and then the smallest size, which maximized the mining potential. In coming up with the plan, the government came up with these three options, three plans.

The next step in Steiner's process is crucial. It is the step of citizen involvement.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

The consultations revealed that the people supported the plan that was the most likely to protect the ecological heritage, and that was the largest park. They wanted the biggest park so that as much as possible would be protected. However, the Conservatives ignored

what the people said. Counter to the facts, the Conservatives decided on a small zone and neglected to include some very important wildlife areas.

On Radio-Canada International, Stephen Kakfwi said that the government had taken the heart right out of the park, leaving the door open to mining exploration, a gaping hole in the middle of the national park.

[*English*]

Therefore, in ignoring the people of the area, the Conservative government has made a mockery of the whole planning process. Those scientific steps I mentioned take a lot of time. There is science that goes into it. There is a lot of consultation and analysis. In doing so, it is actually quite a costly process. It is costly for a reason. The people who are employed in the planning sector have to undergo a long education. They take, sometimes, 10 or 20 years to learn exactly how the landscape works. They develop an in-depth knowledge of the landscape and of the science of the systems of the landscape in order to preserve that landscape for future generations.

We often see, in all scales of landscape projects, that developers have an idea in mind. They have to go through the consultation and the analysis process out of policy requirements, yet their will is something else. They might actually go through all the steps of the planning process just to be able to implement the idea they always had in their heads.

I suspect that is the case today with this project and this national park, because it appears that the fix was in from the start. When it was at the first stage of planning, which was identifying planning problems and opportunities, and the second, which was establishing goals, the government had decided already that it was going to promote mining interests in this area. By promoting mining interests, it let the scientists and planners do their jobs and let them develop the three options to show that it was being responsible, but it always had in mind that it was going to choose the option with the least ecological protection and the most for mining interests.

I guess that would have been acceptable if when the government went to the actual consultation process it heard that people wanted the option that promotes mining interests the most. If it had said that, then it would have been acceptable. It would have gone through the steps and would have been able to convince the people of the area that this is what they wanted, for the mining companies to do their job there as much as possible. However, that was not the case. What happened was that people spoke out and said they did not want the smallest area preserved; they wanted the largest area preserved.

I would like to deliver this message to the people in the Arctic, in the Nahanni watershed. Under an NDP government they would not have to worry. We would consider expanding the park to the size that was desired.

Government Orders

My last point refers to the final steps in Steiner's planning process, which are implementation and administration. We could go through all the other steps of planning but if we do not implement the plan vigilantly and administer it vigilantly, then there really is no purpose to any of the planning process that goes on, because no one is watching what is actually being done in that area. I strongly suspect, looking at past budgets and the current budget, not enough capital has been put into these crucial steps in the protection of this area.

Although we will support the bill at second reading, we believe there is a lot lacking in the plan for this national park.

• (1320)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my friend's comments with respect to the development of this proposed new national park. He raised a really important concept with respect to ecological boundaries. I would like him to expand on what was missing, which would have been of ecological significance in the larger park proposal that should have been included, and why the larger park boundary is of importance.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I did not get the time to discuss Forman's ideas, Forman from Harvard, who is also an ecological planner. He has the idea of connectivity of interior habitat, patches and mosaics. Basically, when a landscape is fragmented, disturbances are created in the systems that are there. When we talk about faunal systems such as caribou or other wildlife, by fragmenting the habitat, the connectivity is sometimes ruined, which ruins breeding grounds, feeding, different elements of the habitat of certain wildlife species.

In choosing the smallest plan and cutting out the heart and allowing mining interests, there will be much more fragmentation, and this will have a much greater impact on wildlife groups in the park.

• (1325)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague.

We have seen a pattern with the government where it seems to treat the environment as something that can be stripped and exploited at will, with absolutely little interest in the catastrophic issues that we deal with on climate change.

Of 1,600 submissions that were brought forward, only 2 asked for the option that was chosen by the government, which was to allow maximum mining activity in this pristine area. Could my hon. colleague tell me why he thinks the government completely ignored 93% of people who said that this area needed to be protected?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: As I mentioned before in my speech, Mr. Speaker, the government obviously entered into the planning process in bad faith. At the beginning of the process, it already had in mind that it would maximize mining interests in the park and it held on to that idea in the face of scientific analysis and in the face of public consultation.

The government used the planning and public consultation process as a way to legitimize its bad decision of maximizing mining interests for the sole goal of short-term growth against long-term ecological planning for future generations.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear the NDP will be supporting the development of this park. It is great news to have an additional national park added to Canada's vast suite of national parks.

Opposition members are not being quite honest about the numbers they are presenting when they talk about 93% of the consultation process. Of the 1,600 consultations that occurred, under 60 people contributed an opinion one way or another about those park boundaries. In terms of picking an option, the numbers were very low.

The government had a decision to make and the government did that in consultation with the great people of the Northwest Territories. The business interests that were important in that region were included. The people of the Northwest Territories asked for those opportunities, and we responded.

It is important that NDP members at least acknowledge they are not being completely accurate when they throw out the percentages but do not acknowledge what those percentages represent in terms of the raw number of people consulted on a plan that would be good for that region both in terms of economic and environmental protection.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, if the government put energy into implementation and administration, and backed it up with people and firm numbers that actually made sense for the protection of these areas, then perhaps we could entertain the idea that this would be done responsibly. The government has not even put anything from the budget into the administration of these areas, which renders the whole planning process meaningless.

The government has ignored the people who have made boundary decisions. There is not a huge population up in the Arctic, so a figure like 1,600 people is significant and a figure of 65 people expressing a boundary interest is significant, and should be taken into account.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to represent the people of the great region of northern Ontario, which, latitudinally, is south of the Nahanni watershed, but still represents the great north of Canada.

In the beginning, we are talking about Senate Bill S-5, the Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve boundaries. They are adjacent to and north of the Nahanni National Park Reserve, a beautiful area of our country. My dear friend Jack Layton always spoke of the impact that the Nahanni left on him when he visited it a number of years ago. For him, seeing the great beauty of Canada was a transformative moment.

Government Orders

I think Canadians watching this are asking themselves about the government's appalling attitude toward the environment and the games that have been played again and again with the serious issues of catastrophic climate change facing us. For example, when we ask questions in the House about the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its findings, we generally hear laughter and ridicule from the Conservative backbenchers, as though this was made up or, as the Prime Minister once said, some kind of socialist plot. He might think it is a socialist plot but it is real, and we all live on this one planet.

When we talk about how the decision on this park reserve was made, we need to look at it in terms of this rip-and-ship philosophy of the Conservative government.

I represent vast mining regions, some of the largest gold and copper mines. The deepest copper based metal mine in the world is in my region. There are diamond mines. My region is used to resource development, but what we see from the government is akin to a gambler's addiction to resources with absolutely no interest in the future, whether it is value-added processing or the protection of the environment. It believes that what should be written into any development project is that our children and grandchildren carry the cost of the quickest way of getting resources out of the ground. Whether it is the bitumen in the tar sands or strip mining, the environment of our country should be pay the debt.

We are looking at the land reserve that was set aside. I will talk a bit about public process and the scam when we deal with very large interests that decide they would put their own financial interests above the interests of the public good. As we talk about this, I want to talk about this very important protected area and the need to have protected areas in Canada. That is not to say there will not be development, we are a development nation. We have enormous geography, but we have to choose to put value on the watersheds and the areas that need to be set aside so there can be protection.

The UN's fifth and final intergovernmental report on climate change released this past week was absolutely shocking. It says that we are now at the point of facing irreversible impacts on people, that these impacts are already being observed, including rising sea levels, more acidic oceans, melting glaciers, Arctic sea ice and increasing erratic weather. Again, the government is like a gambling addict. It does not seem to notice or care that we are mortgaging our future generations so we can get the quickest buck out of the ground without having a long-term sustainable economic plan.

We have the means to limit climate change. Chairman Rajendra Pachauri said, "The solutions are many and allow for continued economic and human development. All we need is the will to change".

I am not one who is pessimistic about the future. I look at what our country did in the Second World War when a country of 10 million people raised the 4th largest navy and air force in the world, and fed Europe because we saw a threat. Yet I see this complete lazy disinterest in addressing the ultimate issue of our generation and our children's and grandchildren's generations, which is the march toward irreversible climate change.

● (1330)

Over the last six decades, Canada has become warmer. In any region of our country, erratic weather patterns have changed substantially. The temperature rose 1.5°C between 1950 and 2010. This does not come from the New Democrats. This does not come from a socialist plot. It comes from a federal government report on the unique risk that Canadians face. The impacts of irreversible climate change will be felt first and foremost in Canada's far north.

Representing the great region of James Bay, Ontario, where the land is sitting about two feet above sea level, and we have huge issues of flooding at the best of times, the issue of not planning for the future of this region, if we are dealing with moving toward irreversible climate change, is going to be catastrophic.

Let us look at the government's commitment to the environment when it comes to this park. We are going to play a little game. I will give three options, door one, two and three, and ask the people back home to figure out what door the Conservatives opened.

Behind door one, we had a park reserve of 6,450 square kilometres focused on protecting the watershed values.

Behind door two, it was diminished. It was 5,770 square kilometres. It lessened the environmental protection and allowed for more mining options.

Behind door three is the smallest reserve. There are 4,840 square kilometres that were built around ensuring the mining companies would have what they needed and whatever interests they wanted. If we wanted, we could preserve the rest. Out of the 1,600 submissions, only 2 asked for door 3, the choice of ensuring maximum mining interests in this Nahanni region, with the minimum of conservation growth.

What does everyone think the Conservative government chose? The answer is obvious. It chose door three, the one that had no local support, that did not preserve the environment and that offered the maximum benefit to the mining interests. It speaks to the Conservative rip-and-ship philosophy that these incredible natural wonders we have been blessed with exist as a backdrop. If we want to strip mine it and dump it, why not there? It is as good a place as any.

The New Democratic Party does not believe in that. Again, representing a region that is heavily based on mining, we know our industries create an environmental impact. We want to work to ensure we have the highest environmental standards.

Government Orders

I talked to mining interests about the direction Canada was going in when, for example, the government cut the navigable waters act and the water protection to 99.97% of our lakes. I said to them that the mining sector must have thought it was really great, and they said no. That is not what they wanted. They want peace on the ground in terms of their ability to do their resource development. They want to be able to say to Canadians that they can do this right. If the government establishes the rules for the environment, they will live by them. That is in all of the conversations I have had with mining interests.

The other thing I hear from the mining sector is that if there is a role for the federal government, it is how does it ensure there is training for the large percentage of unemployed first nations youth who are in the territories, like the Ring of Fire, so they can become employed and part of the economy? That way, we can move together.

However, again and again, we see this myopic belief that the environment will pay whatever price to fast track development, even when the development is not sustainable because we will not get the long-term benefit from the jobs.

We represent a region where people fly in and out, and it is an open pit where there is no value added. Of the many mining families that I know, if we asked them, they would say to leave it in the ground. It is their capital for our future generations. If they are not going to mine it properly and are not going to get the maximum benefits so their communities can grow, then it should be left in the ground. However, that is not the attitude of the Conservative government. Its attitude is get it out as fast as it can and get it on a boat to China, where the value-added processing will happen in another jurisdiction, not here. We do not agree with that.

Going back to this national park reserve, the government presents us with the least favourable option. Are we going to vote against the least favourable option? No. We would rather have some of this protected than nothing.

• (1335)

The government needs to understand that if it is going to have credibility on the international stage when it comes to the issues of climate change, and we see what our European partners are doing, it has to start sending some signals that it does care about the environment.

Stephen Kakfwi, the former premier of the Northwest Territories, said that the way the boundaries were drawn the Prime Minister chose to put the mining interests above environmental interests and that he had unfortunately let Canadians down. He said, "That is not a national park, that is a joke."

Those are serious words from a former premier of the Northwest Territories.

He goes on to state:

[The Prime Minister] has taken the heart right out of it. The middle of [this reserve] is carved out so that mining can happen dead centre in the middle of the proposed national park.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society stated:

...the park boundary proposed in Bill S-5 will not achieve this conservation goal because it leaves out much of the important habitat for woodland caribou, including critical calving and breeding grounds, as well as for grizzly bears and Dall's sheep. It leaves out a significant part of the Little Nahanni River, which is a major tributary of the South Nahanni River and includes some of the most important habitat in the area.

One of my favourite lines of the government is "record investments". Whenever it is cutting money it speaks of record investments, such as record investments in first nation education and record investments in water. If we go to any of those communities they will just laugh and say, "What record investments?"

The Conservatives will say they have record investments in Parks Canada and that they value Parks Canada. They promised us \$391 million in budget 2013. To the folks back home, \$391 million is clearly an impressive number, but how much did they actually spend? They spent \$1 million. That is not even close. Last year they spent \$4 million. We are still not even near what they promised. We will have to wait until after the election for the rest of the more than \$380 million and the next government will have to follow through on that. Therefore, we get the ribbon-cutting, we get the big announcements, we get the promise on a commitment to the environment, but none of the money comes forward.

In Parks Canada, we see the layoff of employees, the issue of crumbling infrastructure, and the need to maintain these important jewels, these watersheds, that are crucial to maintaining the biodiversity of this country.

However, there is also the sense of how people view us internationally. When I am in the far north of Canada I regularly meet Europeans who come here because they are fascinated by the immense beauty of regions such as the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. They come here because this is their view of Canada. There is an enormous economic power to these national parks because people see that Canada still has them in areas where the rest of the world does not. Therefore, we have to put some value back by saying that these should be protected watersheds. This is not to be anti-development, but development has to be done in a smart and sustainable fashion with a sense of balance. Right now, there is absolutely no balance with how the government is approaching resource development.

In terms of the three options that were laid out, only two submissions supported the weakest option, but that is the one the government chose. Anyone who has been involved in a public consultation process will say that more often than not it is a shell game. When there is a mega-project to be developed, the rules have changed. Now, one must prove why public comment is needed, but public comment is a box that is ticked off. When the government has decided that it will go ahead with a major development project or a first nation consultation it just has to tick off the box.

Government Orders

I remember the Conservatives were going to build a toxic waste incinerator in northern Ontario on the territory of the Algonquin Timiskaming First Nation. I worked with the Algonquin nation. The very last night before the consultation period ended the Conservatives showed up in the community with their dog and pony show. The Government of Ontario said it was excellent that they had done a consultation. The Algonquin said that they would see them in court and that was the end of that. That is not consultation.

We also see that the government is almost standing alone in the world in its opposition to the push by the UN on the issue of free, prior, informed consent for the development of projects. There are constitutional provisions that have to be protected.

• (1340)

The conservation plan could have made the government look so good. I know I am not a friend of theirs, but the Conservatives could use some loving now on the environment. They could use a bit of credibility, just a fig leaf. They could just give us something. I am not even going to beat on the Conservatives. They are just so over the top with their attitude. They could have done something. They could have said, “We are not going to go with door number one, which is maximum protection; and we are not going to go with door number three, minimum; we will go with door number two, we will just balance it”.

However, “balance” to the Conservatives is a word that sounds like weakness or socialism or extremism or radicalism. That is their idea of balance, so they are not going to choose balance. They are going to choose the weakest environmental protection with the maximum exploitation of resources.

We will be supporting the bill because we would rather have something than nothing at this point. However, in 2015 they will see a New Democratic government having to do so much work to fix the disaster that the Conservatives have left on our environment.

• (1345)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. He represents a great northern riding in Ontario and I appreciate his concern for both the environment and our national park expansions.

It is important to note that when he talked about the least favourable option in this scenario, the least favourable option would clearly be no expansion at all. It was our government that took the existing Nahanni National Park Reserve, expanded it by 4,000 additional square kilometres and then expanded it again to be the third-largest park complex in all of Canada, to 35,000 square kilometres of wilderness protected in the Northwest Territories. That is courtesy of our government and our government's interest in investing in protection and preservation of the environment.

The hon. member talks about Europeans coming over here, and indeed they do to my territory, to the member for Northwest Territories' territory, to Nunavut and across all of Canada. They come here because we have areas protected. Our government has protected areas bigger than nations in Europe, bigger than the countries from which those visitors come. That is a great record.

The most favourable option is the option that finds balance between development and a strong investment climate. My comment

for the member for Timmins—James Bay is this. He comes from an area where a stable investment climate is required for growth and development, and he must see that there is an absolute need for that balance and we have struck that balance.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague and say once again what beautiful country he represents. I left my heart in the Yukon. It is almost as nice as Timmins—James Bay and yes, as I have said, we are mining country.

I would warn the member to be wary of bringing in European states. We could probably fit Luxembourg and a few other areas right into the city of Timmins. Certainly, we can fit all of Great Britain into Timmins—James Bay. When we travel five hours, that is called “going to work”. When they travel five hours that is like going across Europe and back for weeks. We have to be careful here when we deal with the issue of size.

In case I misunderstood my colleague in saying that it was courtesy of the Conservatives who had this vision, the way I heard the story was this. I am from Timmins—James Bay and I did not get to university, but the way I heard the story was that it was first nations people who have been fighting for this for a long time, before even the present European tourists came over, and before our European tourists came over and actually never left.

The best option is the one that finds the balance. With the incredible beauty of the land of the North, we have enormous opportunity for a stable economic climate. That is why international miners have returned to Canada; because we are stable economy. Let us just protect the beautiful areas that we have.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, and I note that he comes from an area that has some of the most beautiful, pristine provincial parks certainly in Ontario.

I think of the particular instance dealing with the ancient red pine forest, the old growth forest that we find, I believe, either in his riding or in the adjacent riding. I would like to get the member's comment with respect to how Ontario dealt with that particular situation as compared to the situation that is before us here on this proposed national park.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, let me talk about my backyard. Just down the road there is Four Bass Lake, which is an area of Temagami, which has some of the most beautiful canoeing lakes in the country.

I have admit that I love wilderness and I live in wilderness, but as my old man said, “if you can't see it from a car window, it's not worth looking at”. Therefore, I actually do not see a lot of the beauty of our land because my family does not sleep on the ground. I have to admit it, but it is just a thing we have. It is like being Scottish working class.

We are sitting in some of the most beautiful country, but there have been huge fights in our area to protect the wilderness value. In the Temagami region on Red Squirrel Road, I have friends who were on both sides of the blockades, the people who wanted to work and the people who wanted to protect it.

Government Orders

These are hard decisions. They are hard issues because we are talking about an economy that is based on extraction and also talking about the need to preserve. We managed to preserve the white pine forests and it is good because it is a long-term value for our grandchildren. Every time I drive by them on the way home, I thank God I live in such beautiful country and some day I am going to get in a canoe and actually go a little farther and see it, but that might wait a few years.

● (1350)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was particularly taken by the member's comments about climate change in the context of this northern park. I had the pleasure of hiking and backpacking across Auyuittuq National Park this summer. I saw climate change in Nunavut up close and personal as we could watch the glaciers recede and the waters were much higher. This is not theory; this is practice. When we talk to national park staff they confirm what my friend has said, which is that the budgets for national parks are not being kept up.

In the context of my friend's remarks about this park, does the number of kilometres that have been saved matter if we have no credible plan to manage that park? When the former premier of the Northwest Territories is saying that they have "taken the heart right out of it. The middle of it is carved out so that mining can happen dead centre in the middle of the proposed national park."

Without a management plan, does it really matter how large the created entity would be?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Victoria for bringing me back to the point. My colleague in the Conservatives had me off track for a second there.

The issue is serious. We are talking about the UN report on the impacts of what irreversible climate change will mean and we have to understand that in Canada we are a northern climate. It will have devastating impacts. I know it will have devastating impacts in my region where we are so close to sea level in terms of the upper James Bay and the Hudson Bay region.

In terms of commitments, it is not enough to be able to say we have done this, or we are going to issue a press release or do one of those actions for the economy. That means nothing. We have to put money behind our resources. We have to put laws in place to ensure environmental protection. This is what the rest of the world is seeing from Canada. It is seeing a lot of hot air, literally, but it is not seeing any commitment to moving forward, while the rest of the world is starting to move forward because people understand the urgency of this issue.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I share my friend's concerns about this park. When someone with the experience of Steve Kakfwi, both a leader in his first nation and a leader at the political level as former premier, expresses concerns that this park's boundaries are entirely political and do not represent the consensus that was achieved between first nations and previous governments, I am concerned.

Does the hon. member believe that there is time in this Parliament to fix the boundaries of this park so that it respects what was required for ecological integrity, what is needed for species protection and what was agreed upon by first nations in the Yukon?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, certainly what the consultation process heard was the option for protection in this watershed area. That is what was said. That is what was agreed on and that was not delivered by the government. Now the bill is being brought through the Senate and we are put in the difficult position of being told to take something rather than nothing. We should be taking the best because we need to send that message.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one part of the speech from my friend from Timmins—James Bay that really struck a chord with me was about the government's orientation to the idea and the nature of consultation.

When the government shows up and holds public meetings and asks for opinions, a lot of Canadians assume—wrongly, in the case of Conservatives—that those consultations will mean something. They assume that in whatever plan comes out the other end—in this case for a protected area, and in other cases for proposed pipelines going across Canada—the consultation will be meaningful.

First nations have a very strong legal argument that has been supported by recent Supreme Court decisions bolstering the effect and importance of consulting with them. However, there are many other Canadians who are feeling left out of this process and whose lives are on the line in some cases. Their livelihoods and communities may be on a pipeline route or adjacent to a major mine with a potential for effluent or pollution to come from it.

The Conservatives' approach to resource development is what they call "bulldozer politics": just push through any type of opposition or comments rather than incorporating local wisdom and know-how, which should be the basis of any decision the government makes.

Is there not a sea change required in Canada for those who seek to do something with natural resources? Should we not develop resources and add value, rather than ship everything out raw? Should we not bring community consultation to its rightful place at the heart of our decision-making, rather than, as the member said, having some tick-box that gets ticked off and pushed to the side? That approach, by the way, only builds resistance in those very same communities.

Why not incorporate the wisdom, intelligence, and long-standing knowledge of the areas we are talking about from those people who live there and have the most on the line, as opposed to the bulldozer approach used by Conservatives? The bulldozer approach helps nobody, certainly not those communities, and many would now argue that it does not help industry either.

● (1355)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague. He has been on the front line of issues regarding pipelines, including the Kinder Morgan and northern gateway projects.

Statements by Members

The current government does not seem to clue into the fact that it needs a social licence. Without a social licence, I am sorry, nothing goes ahead. Kinder Morgan can threaten people on Facebook with legal action and try to intimate people and the National Energy Board can try to keep people from speaking at hearings, but until a social licence is obtained, those projects will not go ahead.

In terms of issues in the resource development sector, when I was working with the Algonquin Nation 14 years ago, nobody talked to the first nations. Now they know that they have to sit down and negotiate.

However, until we move forward with the sense of getting the buy-in from the public—and it is possible, and big projects can move ahead—we end up with what we have in the Ring of Fire, which is billions of dollars of potential still sitting in the ground because the Conservative government and the provincial Liberals cannot get their heads around respectful consultations.

ROYAL ASSENT

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

November 5th, 2014

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 5th day of November, 2014, at 5:26 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Wallace

Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor

The schedule indicates that royal assent was given to Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in contraband tobacco); Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act; Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Criminal Code in response to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in Attorney General of Canada v. Bedford and to make consequential amendments to other Acts; and Bill C-501, An Act respecting a National Hunting, Trapping and Fishing Heritage Day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

NÁÁTS'IHCH'OH NATIONAL PARK RESERVE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act (Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve of Canada), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

GASOLINE PRICES IN SUDBURY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, drivers in my riding of Sudbury are fed up with the unfair price of gas in our community.

Compared with neighbouring cities, Sudbury often pays 10¢ to 20¢ more per litre. To fill up one's tank, this could mean an extra \$10 or \$15, which adds up quickly in a northern community where for most people driving to work is not a choice but the only option they have.

In response to the growing unrest, since June more than 9,000 frustrated people have contacted the Competition Bureau, demanding an investigation into the price of gas in Sudbury, yet under the rules put in place by the current Conservative government, even such an overwhelming volume of complaints does not warrant an investigation.

If 9,000 complaints cannot force an end to unfair gas prices in Sudbury, then what can?

When will the Conservatives finally support the NDP's proposal to create an oil and gas ombudsman with a mandate to directly respond to the concerns of Canadians?

* * *

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in light of the 85th anniversary of the Persons Case, I acknowledge the many Canadians who are working to ensure that all human beings are recognized in law.

Canada truly is among the world's elite when it comes to valuing and protecting human rights, except that we are one of only three countries in the world with no legal protection for children before birth. Sadly, this includes unborn babies who are eliminated and have their precious lives ended just because they are girls.

Britain knows it is wrong. Its Parliament declared sex-selection abortions illegal by a 181-to-1 vote.

Canada can fix this too. Let us start by having this Parliament condemn gender-selection abortion. What better day to recognize this than on Persons Day?

Statements by Members

As Dr. Seuss once said, “A person's a person. No matter how small.”

* * *

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mrs. Marguerite Gillam, originally from Aguathuna, but now residing in Stephenville, in Random—Burin—St. George's.

On November 11, this remarkable woman will celebrate her 100th birthday.

Mrs. Gillam demonstrated an aptitude for and love of music at a very young age. She learned to play piano at age seven, and later the accordion. She performed with a local band, provided music during silent movies at the local theatre, and was the organist at her church for 35 years.

Mrs. Gillam enjoyed travelling, and among her favourite memories are the times she spent swimming in the Bahamas.

She spent several years as a teacher and has been an active member of her community, including knitting and crocheting items which she often donated to local charities.

When a storm destroyed the Anglican church in her community in 1948, she was instrumental in securing funding and free labour to build a new church.

Mrs. Gillam and her husband Israel raised three children. She has 11 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren, and 2 great-great-grandchildren.

I ask all members of the House to join me in wishing Mrs. Gillam a very happy 100th birthday.

* * *

MOM OF THE YEAR COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to Marlene Pannenbecker from my hometown of Lacombe, Alberta, who was recently named 2014 Walmart Mom of the Year Community Champion, and rightly so.

Marlene is an example of selflessness in action. On any given day, one can find Marlene raising donations, doing humanitarian work abroad, or handing out hot chocolate and toiletries to people staying at local shelters.

Marlene and her husband Denny have also adopted four orphaned children from Haiti.

Having lost her own son in a tragic accident last January, Marlene put aside her own grief to visit the other people involved in that accident and take care of them while they were recovering. Once they were released, she also helped arrange daily meals for the men who spent the last moments with her son.

Marlene is the definition of amazing, generous, selfless, and courageous. I can think of no one more deserving of the title “Mom of the Year”.

Congratulations to Marlene. She is an inspiration to all of us.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 1, I had the honour of participating in the inauguration of a commemorative monument in honour of veterans of Portuguese origin at Pedro Da Silva park in Laval. This is a reminder that, as my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore said yesterday, Canadians of many different origins have fought side by side, a reflection of the diverse and inclusive Canadian society that we love and laud.

I would like to salute Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Jourdain, outgoing commander of the 4th Battalion Royal 22nd Regiment, for his 35 years of service.

I would also like to mention the involvement of members of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 251, Chomedey, which organized next Sunday's ceremony in Laval for Remembrance Day 2014.

[*English*]

Lest we forget.

* * *

● (1405)

NOVEMBER 6

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 147 years ago, November 6, 1867, was the first day of the first session of the first Parliament of Canada.

As we mark this anniversary, we are reminded of the responsibility we carry, as members of this House, to leave Canada a better place than we found it.

Also today, millions of Sikhs around the world are celebrating the 546th birthday of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first guru. It is a very special day to celebrate his teachings and share his message of peace and respect for all faiths. As he said, before becoming a Muslim, a Sikh, a Hindu, or a Christian, let us become a human first.

On behalf of myself and the entire Shory family, I extend my best wishes to all those marking this auspicious day.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today for the fourth consecutive year, I am wearing purple, along with members from both sides of the House, in support of the London Abused Women's Centre's Shine the Light on Woman Abuse campaign.

The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness around the issue of woman abuse and its effect on society.

Organizations, schools, neighbourhoods, sports teams, and places of worship across London will be asked to participate by wearing purple.

I am proud that this London campaign has grown to more than sixteen cities and four counties across Ontario.

Statements by Members

Since 2007, our government has funded more than \$70 million in projects to end violence against women and girls through the women's program at Status of Women Canada.

Together we take a stand against violence against women and girls, which has no place in this country or any other country, and it will not be tolerated.

I would like to congratulate the London Abused Women's Centre, especially executive director Megan Walker for shining the light on woman abuse.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2014 Shine the Light on Woman Abuse campaign kicked off in London, Ontario, on November 1 .

The goal of this month-long campaign is to raise awareness of abuse suffered by women in our communities by illuminating towns and cities and even regions in purple light.

Purple is the colour of courage, survival, and honour. Women who have been harassed or who are in abusive relationships often feel trapped. Their homes, their work places, and their communities are no longer safe places. Women need to know that any shame or blame they may feel does not belong to them, but to their abusers.

I invite all Canadians to show their support in the fight to end violence against women by wearing purple throughout the month of November.

* * *

SIKHISM

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 545th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Millions of Sikhs around the world are celebrating the birth of the founder of the Sikh religion, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. His message of peace and respect for all faiths continues to ring true to this day.

As the Prime Minister said today in his statement:

The values of Sikhism, including compassion, justice, and respect, are also Canadian values.

Canada is the proud home of one of the largest and most dynamic Sikh populations outside India. Whether it is in our economic or cultural sectors, Sikhs in Canada have worked tirelessly to help build and define our great nation.

I would like to wish Sikhs around the world a very happy and prosperous Gurburab.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOOD ASSISTANCE DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2014 HungerCount report was released last Tuesday, and it shows that requests for food assistance increased by 9.4% at the Moisson Mauricie/Centre-du-Québec. This is an alarming statistic, and with the holiday season just around the corner, many families risk being in need.

I therefore invite everyone in my riding to take part in the various Christmas hamper initiatives in the region. The Artisans bénévoles de la paix en Mauricie recently launched their Christmas hampers campaign. People can also contribute to the Christmas hampers being organized by the Centre d'action bénévole de la MRC de Maskinongé in Louiseville. People who live in Berthierville can attend a dinner on November 24 to raise funds for the Christmas hampers being organized by the Groupe d'entraide en toute amitié. Of course, we must not forget the media fundraising drive in Mauricie on December 4.

I wish to congratulate the organizers of all these initiatives, which will help many families have a much nicer holiday season. It is important to get involved and give generously to this worthy cause. Let us continue to stand together.

* * *

● (1410)
[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to our historic family tax cut, all families with children will be better off. That includes working parents, stay-at-home parents, single parents, one-earner families, and two-earner families. Indeed, all families with children will have more money in their pockets.

The average benefit is more than \$1,100, and the vast majority of the benefits will go to middle and lower income families. However, the Liberal leader will take these benefits away from families. Unlike him, we know Canadian families work hard and deserve a break.

I am proud that our government is giving money back to each and every family with children in Canada.

* * *

SIKHISM

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth, which is celebrated worldwide and is an ideal time to share his message of peace and respect for all faiths.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji is the founder of Sikhism and the first of the Sikh gurus. He travelled widely, teaching people the message of one God, human rights, and justice. His life and teachings are of profound significance to all. In fact, his message of community, equality, love, and service provides inspiration for all humanity.

My favourite Guru Nanak Dev Ji story is that, when his father gave him money to find a job and seek his fortune, he instead took the money and fed those in need.

Canada is proud to be home to one of the largest Sikh communities outside India. We think of the community as it comes together in prayer and looks forward to the coming year.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians, we can be proud that we are a welcoming nation and home to many newcomers who seek safety, security, and protection. Although Canada is a generous and tolerant country, our openness does not extend to barbaric cultural practices that seek to harm women and girls.

Studies show that there are hundreds of cases of forced marriage in Ontario alone, and there have been 21 Canadian criminal cases of honour-based violence in the past decade. One case is too much.

Yesterday, our government tabled legislation in the Senate that would protect newcomer women and girls from violence, including early and forced marriages, spousal abuse, violence in the name of so-called “honour”, and other gender-based violence.

Canada will not tolerate practices such as polygamy, early and forced marriages, or honour killings. We will continue to ensure that Canada's women and girls have the tools they need to succeed and flourish in this great nation of ours.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my fellow MPs for last night's vote, giving all-party support to my bill making Remembrance Day a national holiday.

As a new MP, I was skeptical about what could be accomplished in Ottawa, but the importance of all-party co-operation strengthens my faith in our democracy. It makes me even prouder to represent the people of Scarborough.

From my great-grandfather Harold Riley, who served in both world wars, to family members who have done tours in Afghanistan, Remembrance Day has shaped our family history and always held great personal meaning.

Under my bill, Bill C-597, November 11 would be given the same legal status as Victoria Day and Canada Day, the two legal holidays listed in the Holidays Act. The recognition of this day in law is something that all members of the House can be proud of. Let us all continue to work for the benefit of veterans and their families. Lest we forget.

* * *

● (1415)

TAXATION

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is giving more money to parents, but the Liberals and the NDP want to give more money to the bureaucrats. We are cutting taxes, but the Liberal leader wants to raise taxes. Our plan helps 100% of families with kids, but the NDP plan helps only 10% of families.

The average benefit of our family tax cut is over \$1,100, and every parent would receive up to \$1,920 per child. The moms and dads should have the money, because they know what is best for their children. They do not need the Liberal leader's paternalistic approach, to tell them how to spend their own money.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, despite record profits, Scotiabank laid off 1,500 workers.

Today, a company announced it was laying off 4,000 employees, not to mention Ford, which chose to build a plant in Mexico instead of Ontario. Hundreds of jobs were lost.

Do the Conservatives realize that their policies are directly linked to these setbacks?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been focusing on job creation, economic growth, and long-term prosperity, and we have delivered that with over 1.1 million net new jobs since the economic downturn. We understand that is the key, along with opening new markets, to creating jobs in the future. Our government will continue on that track.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have long known that Conservatives are more talk than action when it comes down to tackling tax evasion, but it turns out they are actually part of the problem.

An international investigation has revealed that a Canadian crown corporation used a phoney Luxembourg shell company to avoid paying foreign taxes.

How are Canadians supposed to trust the Conservatives to crack down on aggressive tax avoidance when they are busy setting up shell companies of their own?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, this administration is at arm's length from the federal government. Its business and affairs are managed on a day-to-day level by a board of directors. That is how it works.

We on this side of the House expect that all investments should be done in compliance with laws, rules, and regulations in a transparent manner and to the greater benefit of the clients.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it almost seems as if the minister is acting at arm's-length from his own job. He has to admit that cuts to government departments are responsible for this.

Reports tabled in Parliament yesterday revealed that CRA is understaffed by 642 full-time positions compared to planned levels; so perhaps it is little surprise that it dramatically missed its target for full-scale investigations for prosecution

Oral Questions

When will the minister admit that his cuts are ruining our ability to crack down on tax evaders?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Actually, Mr. Speaker, we have a strong record of getting tough on tax cheats. In fact, the CRA has audited more than 8,000 international tax cases, identifying over \$5.6 billion in additional taxes, taxes that are being collected. We are being aggressive.

We are making sure that Canada has one of the most extensive tax treaty networks in the world, with 92 tax treaties and 21 tax information exchange agreements in force.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Revenue stands idly by while the crown corporation responsible for administering the public sector pension fund uses shell companies as part of a tax avoidance scheme.

How will the minister explain to public servants in her own department, who fight tax evasion on a daily basis, that the money in their own pension fund is invested in a notorious tax haven?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, PSP Investments, which is responsible for meeting the obligations with regard to federal government pensions accrued since 2000, operates at arm's length from the government. It is not part of the federal public administration. Its affairs are managed by a board of directors.

We expect investments to be done in compliance with laws, rules and regulations, in a transparent manner, while keeping in mind the best interests of its clients.

* * *

● (1420)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, some serious allegations surfaced regarding the conduct of certain members of the House.

Last February, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women issued a series of recommendations on harassment in the workplace, including the House of Commons.

Could the chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women tell us when the committee will meet to discuss the government's response to this report?

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I know that she fought hard to make harassment a thing of the past over the course of her career in the public service. Harassment is unacceptable. Regardless of the workplace, everyone deserves to work in a safe and respectful environment. That clearly does not seem to be the case on Parliament Hill.

Let us work together to address this situation and make harassment a thing of the past.

TAXATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the latest figures on economic growth show that the Canadian economy actually shrank in August. The GDP is down.

The government has no growth agenda. Its sole reliance on the oil sector is wobbly. The dollar is down. The Governor of the Bank of Canada is telling 200,000 young people to work for nothing while they live in their parents' basement.

How can the government justify a \$2 billion income-splitting giveaway that helps only 15% of households, disproportionately the wealthy, and discourages economic growth?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the OECD has downgraded global growth, it has said that Canada's growth rate will be superior to that of most G7 countries. In fact, we have created 20% more jobs than Germany and more than most countries in the G7.

Just yesterday, Standard and Poor's reconfirmed our top AAA rating, and we are going to have a surplus next year.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 100 other countries in the world will grow faster than Canada next year.

The government's income-splitting scheme is riddled with discrepancies. That is why it will not give straight answers. A couple struggling to raise a family on a single \$45,000 income will get just \$150 from income splitting. That is a grand total of 40 cents a day, but if the salary is \$160,000, like an MP's, for example, they will get \$2,000. That is what Jim Flaherty warned against, and it has not been corrected.

It is expensive, unfair, and anti-growth. Why?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, under what our Prime Minister announced last week, every single Canadian family with children under 18 will benefit from this.

Here is the difference between Conservatives and Liberals. Liberals think that if we put more money in parents' pockets, they will spend it on beer and popcorn. We disagree. We believe that helping families make their lives more affordable is good for the economy, is good for the country, and is good for Canadian families.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' income splitting plan does nothing for parents who have similar incomes.

In the Atlantic provinces, income splitting will not apply to a family in which one parent works in the tourism industry and the other in the fishing industry. In Quebec, income splitting will not apply to a family in which one parent works in the arts and the other in the non-profit sector. In Ontario, income splitting will not apply to a family in which both parents are teachers.

Why adopt such a costly measure that will do absolutely nothing for these people?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the income splitting, the family tax cut we have introduced that we are going to be giving to families, will impact close to half the families, 1.7 million families, in Canada. Two-thirds of those families are moderate- to low-income. In addition to that, as we are so pleased to have told families, we are increasing the universal child care benefit as well as expanding it.

Canadian families count on this government, count on Conservatives to put more money in their pockets. We will follow through on our commitment to Canadian families.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that another train derailed. This time it happened near Sept-Îles.

This incident, like many others, reminds us of the government's important responsibility to ensure rail safety. The Department of Transport's performance report indicates that 700 transportation safety positions have not been filled. Seven hundred. How can the government protect Canadians when it is reducing the number of inspectors?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Transport Canada is closely monitoring the situation. We would like to thank the first responders for their quick actions. We are aware of the report of a train derailment following what seems to have been a landslide. However, we are waiting for the authorities to determine the cause of the incident.

[English]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is something troubling happening regarding transport safety under the government's watch. Yesterday we learned from the departmental performance report of Transport Canada that there is systematic understaffing for almost every category of transportation safety and security, with hundreds of unfilled positions. Transport Canada, by its own admission, is saying that it has 700 fewer employees for inspection and oversight.

Why is the government cutting transportation safety and security employees?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Transport Canada has been consistently hiring inspectors. The

member knows that. That is all part of a \$100-million investment in our rail safety framework. In fact, in response to the final recommendations of the Transportation Safety Board, just last week, he will note that additional auditors are also being hired. That is because we take the safety and security of Canadians and our rail system very seriously.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, the minister had quite a few interesting things to say about health care benefits for refugee protection claimants.

He said that providing health care to refugees is not a Canadian value. He disagrees with the court, which forced him to restore the 2012 system, and he still wants to appeal the court's decision.

What is more, he thinks that it is shameful to ask questions about refugees who cannot obtain health care.

I wonder why the minister does not think it is shameful to refuse to provide health care.

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is actually shameful here is the series of NDP statements this week. They claim that refugees are not receiving health care. That was never the case and it will never be the case with this government. The NDP must stop saying otherwise and misleading the public.

We are proud of the health care we offer to refugees, and we are determined to protect taxpayers' interests. That is why we are going to appeal and why we will continue to ask the NDP why it insists on providing health care to those who are subject to removal according to—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to think he should decide who deserves life-saving health care. I think he fails to grasp just how cruel this health care program reform is.

Let us talk about the people who, according to the minister, do not deserve health care. For example, these cuts mean that a teenager with post-traumatic stress syndrome who has attempted suicide several times would not be able to get the psychiatric drugs he needs even if he has valid IFHP coverage.

Does the minister really think that this kind of treatment is acceptable?

• (1430)

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about what is really going on.

Refugees, including children, are receiving and have always received health care. With our announcement yesterday, we complied with the court's decision. Children and pregnant women will continue to receive health care.

Oral Questions

What is really scandalous and even cruel is the NDP's insistence that people facing deportation by Canadian court order should get health care.

Does the NDP have any respect at all for our justice system's decisions?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify something. The NDP is talking about asylum seekers, not refugees.

The minister said he disagreed with the court's decision. That means he thinks the following situation is acceptable: if a young female asylum seeker, a sex slave, were 18 weeks pregnant, she would not be allowed to choose to terminate the pregnancy because she does not have valid coverage.

Does the minister think it is okay to leave this young woman to her own devices? Does he really think that reflects Canadian values?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, human trafficking victims in Canada never stopped getting health care. This government's policy is that they will never lose that right.

What is really scandalous, and the NDP should apologize for this, is that for two days this week, New Democrats doggedly claimed that refugees in Canada were not receiving health care.

Today they have acknowledged their mistake and are now talking about asylum seekers. The fact is that they have no credibility on this issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to think that that kind of treatment is fine. That is why he is appealing the ruling. If he wins, we will see more cases like this one.

A man requiring urgent eye surgery to prevent blindness is refused, and I mean refused, health coverage, because he is said to be a “illegal migrant expected to leave the country”. Ten days later, he receives notification from Citizenship and Immigration Canada that he is eligible for permanent residency status.

Does the minister think that this treatment is okay?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has just given another example of the system working. Permanent residence is what 260,000 people have received this year in this country. There will be room for more next year.

What is scandalous is that the NDP spent half of this week insisting that health care was not going to refugees in this country. That has never been the case. That was misleading the Canadian public. Now it is talking about asylum claimants. It does not have any credibility on this issue.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, standing up for basic Canadian values is never a scandalous thing to do in this Parliament.

Because of his reckless, inhumane policy, a refugee claimant, 32 weeks pregnant, went to two emergency rooms suffering from lower abdominal pain, and on both occasions, she was told that she would

have to be responsible for covering the cost of her visit. She left both on both occasions without being seen.

Why does the minister think treatment like this of a young, pregnant, and likely frightened refugee is a Canadian value?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that our health care system across this country does not turn pregnant women away. It does not turn people away who are in emergency situations. Shame on them for suggesting otherwise.

Yesterday we announced that we were implementing the decision of the court. We are giving additional health care to claimants who are children or pregnant women.

We are also appealing this decision, because Canadian values rest on many foundations. One of them is generosity. One of them is an open society, and another one is the rule of law. We will insist that those who have been ordered to leave this country by courts—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Davenport.

* * *

● (1435)

LABOUR

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, onto another story. Stories of abuse of unpaid interns continue to pile up in this country. In fact, unpaid interns in federally regulated industries have none of the protections paid employees have, things like protection from sexual harassment in the workplace and protection of the right to refuse unsafe work.

My colleague has put forward a bill that would extend these and other protections to unpaid interns. I have a simple question for the government. Will it support our intern protection act?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his question.

I want to be very clear. With respect to individuals who work in federally regulated workplaces, part II and part III of the Canada Labour Code cover them for harassment as well as for many other issues with regard to health and safety.

If there is an individual who has a concern with respect to working in a federally regulated space, please report it to Labour Canada. We will have an inspector look at it immediately and make sure that it is rectified.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the minister's response, we know that is false.

Many businesses violate provincial labour codes and abuse unpaid interns. It is appalling, and for interns who work in federally regulated industries, it is even worse. They have no protection under the law.

I introduced a bill that will give interns basic protections, such as reasonable working hours and protection from sexual harassment.

Will the minister support our intern protection act?

*Oral Questions***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to keeping workplaces safe, fair and productive for Canadians.

[*English*]

I want to be very clear. With respect to employees who believe that their rights under the Canada Labour Code have been violated, they should bring that matter forward to the Canada labour program. We will deal with it immediately, as we have in all cases that have been brought forward. Inspectors will review those issues that have been brought forward to us by the labour program immediately so that they can be resolved.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, millions of two-parent families with young children have been cut out of the Conservatives' income-splitting plan and will get nothing. Single parents get nothing. Parents who are struggling to help their children through university get nothing. Meanwhile, people in the top 1% of earners, like the Prime Minister, would get \$2,000 in their pockets.

Can the Conservatives explain to the millions of Canadians they have forgotten about why income splitting is fair to them?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member is completely wrong, and I understand why the Liberals do not want Canadians to know about the fantastic benefits they will be receiving through our family tax cut as well as our universal childcare benefit expansion. A single parent with two children, earning \$30,000, will receive over \$1,500 per year under our plan. A single parent making \$50,000, with two kids, will see almost \$1,000 in relief and benefits.

Close to two million families, half the families with children, will receive direct benefits. Again, the Liberals do not like that, because they want to keep taxes high. They do not want money in the pockets of families.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are spending more than half a billion dollars on the small business job credit without doing their homework. Yesterday, finance officials admitted that they had not done any internal analysis on how many jobs would be created. The PBO has done its analysis, and it has confirmed that only 800 jobs will be created, at a cost of \$700,000 per job. Why is the government spending half a billion dollars of taxpayers' money without doing its homework?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as opposition members know, the small business job credit will create, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, over 25,000 person-years of employment. It would reduce the cost for the employers of most Canadians, and 780,000 companies, over 90% of businesses, would benefit. This is a good jobs and growth program for small business.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, experts like David Dodge, the IMF, and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce all agree that we need more public investment in infrastructure. Now we can add Governor Poloz to that list. This week he called infrastructure “a key ingredient in our economic growth story”. He said that with interest rates at “a generational low”, the “missing ingredient” is government and the certainty government can provide.

Governor Poloz is right. Will the Conservatives listen to Governor Poloz and to David Dodge? Will they reverse their 90% cut in planned infrastructure spending this year?

• (1440)

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the preamble to that question is entirely incorrect. This Conservative government is making record investments in infrastructure: over \$53 billion over the next decade in predictable, stable funding. That includes \$2 billion disbursed through the gas tax fund alone. We are working very closely with provinces and with municipalities. We are getting the job done.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when SARS hit Toronto, Canada correctly opposed travel restrictions.

Canada's Ebola visa ban goes against the very same regulations the Canadian government helped revise following the SARS crisis. The WHO director-general has said that no evidence exists to support the effectiveness of travel bans as a protective measure. Why is the Canadian government breaking the very rules it asked for?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the WHO and the member opposite are incorrect on this issue. There is no travel ban. Canada has been very clear for many months in discouraging travel by our own citizens, by our own nationals, to Ebola-affected countries, and we are now being consistent. It stands to reason, for the vast majority of Canadians, that we would now discourage people from those countries from travelling to Canada, in order to minimize the risk to public health. That said, travel for essential purposes, including economic purposes, from the three countries affected by Ebola will be permitted when public health can be protected.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is just an ineffective and counterproductive policy.

[*Translation*]

We are not the only ones who are concerned about how Canada is handling the Ebola crisis. The Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group wrote to the Prime Minister to remind him:

Oral Questions

...that closing borders won't stop Ebola and will only exacerbate the crisis and its impact on the private sector and the economies of the three countries.

Why is the minister so determined to close the borders and, in doing so, undermine the efforts to fight Ebola?

[English]

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been absolutely clear from the beginning that we will take precautionary measures to ensure that public health in this country is protected. We have been at the forefront of the international effort to respond to the Ebola outbreak, but we are also being prudent in advising our nationals not to travel to Ebola-affected countries and in discouraging nationals from those countries from coming here to Canada. That said, essential travel will continue. Travel with an economic justification will continue, and it is continuing.

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[Translation]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Canadian Heritage tried unsuccessfully to defend her partisan appointments to the CBC's board of directors, using Pierre Gingras as an example.

Let us talk about Mr. Gingras. Known for his involvement in the Conservative Party and his close ties to their leader in the Senate, he is a former member of the ADQ in Blainville, and was himself under investigation by Canadian Heritage in 2013 for allegations at the Charbonneau commission.

We want to know when the report from that investigation was received and what its findings were.

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the NDP is attacking Canadians who have made an enormous contribution to this country.

As I said yesterday, the CBC is a Crown corporation that operates at arm's length from the government. It will continue to do so. The NDP should realize that those who give their time to serve this country should not be attacked here in Parliament.

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CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a debacle.

The Minister of Infrastructure has finally seen the light. One thing is for sure, this minister's insensitivity has embroiled the family of our Maurice Richard in a huge controversy that it never asked for. Nevertheless, the minister is refusing to close the debate, although there is really no room for debate. This is not a new crossing or a new bridge. Therefore, it does not need a new name.

Instead of getting sidetracked, why does the minister not focus on his real responsibilities: greater transparency in the bidding process, no tolls and, finally, discussions with the government and the CMM.

● (1445)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec confirmed this morning that the new bridge over the St. Lawrence will not bear the name of Maurice Richard. The good news is that a new bridge will be built and 30,000 jobs will be created in the greater Montreal area. That is excellent for the vitality and the economy of the region.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the opposition consistently calls for higher taxes and more spending, our Conservative government has a low-tax plan for jobs and growth. Since we were elected, we have cut taxes more than 180 times so that the overall federal tax burden is at its lowest level in half a century. It is quite an achievement. All this while balancing the books.

Could the Minister of Finance inform the House when Canadians can expect the fall economic and fiscal update?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to tell Canadians that I will be presenting our economic and fiscal update on November 12. While the global economy remains fragile, our government is focused on creating jobs and growth, and we will have a surplus to report next year. Unlike the NDP and the Liberals, who are focused on a high-tax plan, we want to keep the money in Canadian pockets.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Defence is now confirming publicly that the Conservatives' Canada first defence strategy for military procurement is in shambles. The departmental performance report tabled yesterday notes that little more than half of CFDS projects are on time. When we look at the joint and common support projects, none of them are on time, despite a target of 85%. Now that is not performance.

Can the minister explain this abject failure to the House?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our support for the military has been completely unprecedented. That being said, the tabling of the documents with respect to the estimates shows that an extra \$900 million has been allocated to the military, and it increases our budget to over \$19 billion. This is a great success story, because we support the military in this party.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after confirming the first Canadian air strikes in Iraq on Tuesday, Lieutenant-General Jonathan Vance revealed that an estimate of the costs of the military mission had been provided to the minister.

Not only did the minister hide from us the fact that he had an estimate of the costs, but he is also refusing to disclose those figures. Canadians want to know how much money will be spent on this mission.

When will the minister release the estimated cost of the military mission in Iraq?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, there are incremental costs to an operation of this size, but there is one thing I know that we can all agree on: even spending one dollar fighting terrorism would be too much for the NDP. They love to talk about Canadian values. Guess what? Fighting oppression and terrorism is a Canadian value. They just do not get it.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a lack of class and transparency.

When we ask the Minister of Veterans Affairs what is taking him so long to implement the committee's 14 recommendations on the new veterans charter, he vaguely says he is working on it.

The report was tabled in the House six months ago, and all the parties agreed on the aspects of the charter that need to be improved. Veterans and their families cannot wait any longer.

When will the minister implement the committee's recommendations?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been perfectly clear that our government agrees with the spirit and the intent of the vast majority of the committee's recommendations. Our response was positive. In fact, we implemented several recommendations right away. We are getting down to work by removing the red tape identified by the committee, making things better for Canada's veterans. We will continue working hard on behalf of Canada's veterans and their families.

• (1450)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Actually, Mr. Speaker, we learned from yesterday's departmental performance report that the Minister of Veterans Affairs let \$136 million in funding lapse last year. This is entirely due to the minister's failure to act on behalf of our veterans. We also saw the poor response from the minister to the all-party report on Veterans Affairs and the veterans charter.

We ask again. When will these unanimous recommendations be fully implemented?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are acting. We have a strong record when it comes to providing benefits and services for Canada's veterans. As a matter of fact, we have invested almost \$30 billion since taking office. That is \$4.7 billion in additional funding.

I would encourage members opposite to stop playing politics with Canada's veterans before Remembrance Week. If they truly care about Canada's veterans, they need to get on board with the government's initiatives to help Canada's veterans.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, Health Canada found that 24 drug production facilities had so seriously violated safety regulations that they were non-compliant with the law. Now, the Conservatives knew this in 2013 and did not notify the public until now, a year after the U.S. Food and Drug Agency flagged the problem.

In 2011, the Auditor General warned the government that it took too long to notify Canadians of drug safety risks. Why did they put Canadians at risk, and should we divest their role to the FDA?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I expect Health Canada to take all drug safety issues very seriously and we will not tolerate any drug safety risks. The member knows that when this information became available to Health Canada and it was able to see the technical reports and do its own analysis, we immediately moved to ban several companies that are situated in India. We will continue to do exactly that when we get any information like this.

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[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the courts ordered the government to restore health services for all asylum seekers.

The minister just said he is limiting full coverage to children and pregnant women. What about women who are not pregnant or seniors? Will the government comply with the court's full ruling or will cabinet continue to be in contempt of court?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are complying with the court ruling. We will continue to provide high-quality health care to refugees. Nonetheless, we are appealing the ruling in order to protect Canadian taxpayers' interests.

I want to commend my hon. colleague from Markham—Unionville for acknowledging that health care never stopped being provided to refugees. A few weeks ago, he said otherwise. This week, he is telling the truth.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians live in cities. Canada connects to the world through our cities, but successive Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to understand that we have a national interest in the success of our cities. An NDP government would be committed to playing its part to ensure that our cities are prosperous, fair and sustainable, with thriving economies, with better access to transit, housing and education.

When will the Conservatives wake up to the needs of our cities and the 80% of Canadians who live in them?

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that modern and efficient public transit keeps our cities among the best in the world in which to live. That is why we are making record investments in infrastructure, as explained earlier. We have also made record investments in public transit. Those projects include Waterloo region public transit, Ottawa LRT, and new streetcars for the TTC in Toronto.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians living in urban areas are facing a serious shortage of affordable rental housing, and ever-increasing property costs are making buying a house even less of an option. The NDP has proposed a housing strategy that would unite the three levels of government to ensure that there is affordable housing available.

After years of inaction on the part of Liberal and Conservative governments, will this government finally address the housing problems in our urban communities?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is actually ahead of what the NDP is even suggesting, because we have already signed investment in affordable housing agreements with the provinces across the country. What those agreements do is provide funding to the provinces. They then look at what their priorities are. Some provinces are using it to create new housing units, some are using it for rent subsidies, some are using it to increase seniors housing, because the provinces know what their needs are. We do not believe

it should be Ottawa telling the provinces how to address their housing needs.

We provide the funding and together with our partners, we have actually helped over a million families and individuals with their housing needs. That is working together with the provinces and letting them do what they do best, which is recognizing their needs in their particular jurisdictions.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians, we can be proud of the fact that we are a welcoming nation and home to many newcomers who seek safety, security and protection. Although Canada is a generous and tolerant country, our openness does not extend to barbaric cultural practices that seek to harm women and girls.

Can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration please tell the House what our government is doing to end barbaric cultural practices from happening on Canadian soil?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hard-working member for Mississauga South for her work in the House and her support on this file. She and I are both proud to be part of a government that has tabled legislation that will protect immigrant women and girls from abuse, from violence in the home, from polygamy and even murder, which masquerades for a misguided few under the name of honour.

We are going to stiffen penalties for those responsible for these outrages. Canada will not tolerate barbaric practices such as early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation or honour killings.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has said it would only help with the cleanup of the MV *Miner* should the hulking wreck off Scaterie Island present a navigational or environmental threat.

Two years ago the minister presented the Province of Nova Scotia with a baseline assessment of 6.6 tonnes of asbestos and no fuel on board. The reality is that they have already taken off 30 tonnes of asbestos and are aware of a significant amount of fuel still on board.

The government has signed off on the towing permits and the towing approvals. Does the government now understand that with this environmental threat it has a responsibility to assist?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Province of Nova Scotia is leading this operation.

Immediately following the incident, the Coast Guard acted decisively to protect the marine environment by removing the majority of the diesel and oily water from the vessel. Due to the position of the vessel at the time, some fuel was not accessible until deconstruction permitted access to confined spaces.

It was necessary to monitor the situation until the salvage was carried out. The Coast Guard stands ready to assist the Province of Nova Scotia.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a proposal from Industry Canada has raised serious concerns throughout rural Canada.

It discussed taking spectrum away from rural Internet users and giving it to urban telecom companies. While the minister has claimed no one will lose Internet services as a result of this process, his public comments do not jive with the proposal.

Mayors are concerned, communities are concerned, and business owners are concerned. Can the minister assure Canadians that this will not end up as another example of the government leaving rural Canadians behind in the digital era?

Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to hear that the member is particularly concerned, no less concerned than the Minister of Industry and the government.

Let me be absolutely clear, under no circumstances will our government take spectrum licences away from any local Internet service provider that is providing Internet service to rural Canadians. That is very clear and I hope the member appreciates that.

● (1500)

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has consistently put the interests of Canadian consumers first. We will continue to promote policies that lead to more choice, lower prices and better services.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage update the House on what our government is doing to support Canadian consumers?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's decision by the CRTC to get rid of the 30-day cancellation notice period to cancel cable is very welcome and consistent with our government's "consumer first" agenda.

The cancellation notice was an irritant to Canadians and the CRTC heard them loud and clear. On January 23, Canadians who want to end their cable service will be able to do so without giving notice and without facing extra charges.

Our government will continue our consumer first agenda, and we will continue with programs such as ending fees for paper bills in the telecom sector and delivering choice for consumers in television channels.

Business of the House

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Fondation des entreprises en recrutement de main-d'oeuvre agricole étrangère joins the NDP in denouncing the bungling of the temporary foreign worker program. Because of the Conservatives' mismanagement, Quebec farmers have lost more than \$53 million. Farmers just want the rules to be clear and known in advance.

Will the minister get his program in order and stop hurting Quebec farmers?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is a strong supporter of farmers all across this country. We have undertaken initiatives to support farmers in all that they do.

On the temporary foreign worker program, the farm community has access to particular programs under the temporary foreign worker program. Those particular programs have been exempt from the changes that the government has brought forward.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, FD): Mr. Speaker, we now know exactly where TransCanada wants to lay its pipeline through Quebec. Dozens of communities along the St. Lawrence, including my own, major rivers and even a nature reserve will be affected. What is most alarming is that it appears the decision has been made even before the project is officially launched and the regions have no say in the matter.

When will the government understand that it is up to the regions and the public to choose, not just the pipeline companies?

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in principle our government welcomes the prospect of shipping western Canadian oil to eastern Canada. The independent National Energy Board is undertaking a thorough scientific review of this project. We will rely on the science and the facts when making decisions on these infrastructure projects. That is why we will wait for the open and transparent review process rather than jumping to conclusions.

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[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to rise today to ask the House leader what he has planned for the week of November 17.

Government Orders

However, I would first like to underscore a great success. Yesterday the House came together to give nearly unanimous support to the bill sponsored by the member for Scarborough Southwest, which pays tribute to our veterans. All the members who supported the bill should give themselves a round of applause. I hope the House will continue to co-operate in that way in the future.

I also have another question for the House leader. Since he still needs to designate two opposition days and the parliamentary session is winding down with the holidays just around the corner, could he tell us the exact dates of those opposition days?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my friend has observed, the House of Commons has had an eventful week, but the event that gave me the most satisfaction was seeing the House vote on Tuesday to adopt Ways and Means Motion No. 16. Some watching on TV at home might ask what Motion No. 16 is. That motion enables our government to proceed with the family tax cut and it supports our increase to the \$100 a month universal child care benefit, an increase that would see up to \$1,920 per child, per year going to support Canadian families.

As exciting as that vote was, I was disappointed to see the position of the members of the NDP and the Liberals in particular, who voted against that support for families.

Now, on to the business of the House. This afternoon we will resume and hopefully conclude debate on second reading of Bill C-21, the red tape reduction act.

Tomorrow, we will finish third reading debate of Bill C-22, the energy safety and security act.

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

Next week, of course, is a constituency week, when we will be able to connect with our constituents, as well as have a chance to join them at Remembrance Day ceremonies, in our home communities. This is especially important this year, for many reasons.

When the House returns on Monday, November 17, we will start the report stage of Bill C-18, the Agricultural Growth Act, and after question period, we will start the report stage of Bill C-27, the Veterans Hiring Act. Both of those bills have been recently reported back from committee.

On Tuesday, November 18, we will have the third day of debate on Bill C-44, the protection of Canada from terrorists act. Since all parties support committee examination of the bill, I would expect that the opposition will agree to let that start after next Tuesday's debate.

[*English*]

Also on Tuesday night, we will complete the concurrence debate on the first report of the agriculture committee.

The following day, we will debate Bill C-18 again.

Finally, on Thursday and Friday of the next sitting week, we will resume debate on Bill C-26, the tougher penalties for child predators act, at second reading.

I was asked directly when the remaining two opposition days will be scheduled. Some time in those remaining four weeks, before we rise for the Christmas break, we will hold those two opposition days.

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate, informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill: Bill C-6, An Act to implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 83.1, the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to present its report on the pre-budget consultations no later than December 12, 2014.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

RED TAPE REDUCTION ACT

The House resumed from October 20 consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to talk to the red tape reduction act. This legislation would enshrine our one-to-one rule in law.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Huron—Bruce.

Before I talk about this specific legislation, I want to take a trip down memory lane. I and a number of my colleagues in the House were privileged to be part of the Red Tape Reduction Commission. The commission's goal was to be transformative in how the government related to and worked with small businesses.

Government Orders

We all know how critical small businesses are to Canada's economy. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business told us how small businesses were being strangled in the red tape of federal, provincial and municipal governments. The commission provided us with the opportunity to focus on what was happening at the federal government level.

A number of people made up the commission, including a number of my colleagues in the House, as well as businessmen and people from across the country who had practical ideas.

We started this process in January 2011 and it concluded in March 2011. Over that period of time, we heard from people from all across the country. We had 15 round tables in 13 different cities. We received online submissions. We reviewed what other provinces and countries were doing and we reviewed what the experts had to say.

The commission had some clear goals. We wanted to reduce the administrative burden and improve government service. We wanted to enhance co-operation and coordination. We were looking to address the specific needs of small business. Small business owners are much more overwhelmed by the onerous needs that governments create as opposed to large businesses, with many different departments and the ability to mobilize somewhat more quickly. We were also looking at ensuring we addressed the cumulative burden. These were not the only things we looked at, but they were some of the critical things.

In September 2011, we presented a report that summarized what we heard. This report reflected on the different presentations we had received from people across the country.

We then spent a bit more time taking in what we had heard and looking at what other jurisdictions were doing. We presented another report in January 2012 to the government and that report contained our recommendations. The government then provided its response with a real commitment to move forward on a number of different issues.

We had 2,300 ideas and came up with 15 systemic proposals for the government to consider. They were very large in nature and crossed all government departments. We had 90 department specifics, such as a recommendation to Agriculture Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, and so on.

I remember one story I heard in Vancouver. A woman entrepreneur had left her job as a nurse and put her heart and soul into creating a product to help sick children. Somewhere in the process her product was reclassified from what was called a medical device to a consumer product. This had an enormous impact on her ability to move forward. It was a compelling story as to how we as a government could be more reflective of the needs of small business.

● (1510)

We were able to take it from that 100,000 foot level. It was a great privilege for me. At the time, I was the parliamentary secretary to the Canada Revenue Agency. There were a number of suggestions that came forward to the Canada Revenue Agency on what it might do to reduce the regulatory burden for small business. Telus wanted an online system, the ability for its accountants to get authorizations. Those were some of the things we heard.

We were very proud when the minister won the CFIB, Golden Scissors Award for cutting red tape. She took the recommendations that were specific to the Canada Revenue Agency, drilled down into them, and is in the process of making those changes that were suggested.

Today we are talking about one of the very important pieces that was one of the systemic suggestions that we made. This legislation would fulfill the commitment in October 2012, and was reaffirmed in the 2013 Speech from the Throne.

With this legislation, we hope to make it the law of the land that regulators strictly control the regulatory burdens that they impose on business. Under the one-for-one rule, for every brand new regulation that adds an administrative burden on business, one must be removed. This is smart legislation. It will help Canadian businesses become more productive and succeed in an increasingly global and competitive marketplace.

The red tape reduction act requires that regulators take seriously the requirement to control the amount of red tape imposed on businesses and the costs associated with that red tape.

As we went across the country, the one-for-one rule received a lot of reflection. We heard that more and more regulations were being added. The other thing we heard was that some regulations had more of a load on small businesses than other regulations. If we have a one-for-one rule, we need to reflect on what that burden to the business will be. It is not like we should take out something that is an easy regulation to comply with and put in something that will take hours and hours of the time of the small business.

We listened to that advice from small business owners from across the country and we reflected very carefully on that advice. That has been designed into the legislation.

The legislation challenges our regulators to think through how regulations can be designed and implemented in ways that do not impose unnecessary red tape on business. It is tough, but it is absolutely not inflexible. It can be applied in a way that will not compromise the protection of human health, safety, security, the economy and the environment.

That is another important issue. As we went across the country, many of the small businesses recognized that the government had an important role in terms of regulations, human health, safety, security, the economy and the environment. They appreciated government's role in that way, but they also wanted us to try, to the degree possible, to ensure we had that appropriate balance.

This legislation is also very timely. As we are looking to create a climate in which businesses can innovate and grow, too often red tape can get in the way. I mentioned an example earlier.

We have an economy that is important in how our small businesses contribute. There will be enormous opportunities with the European free trade agreement and the Korean free trade agreement. We want to support our businesses to be successful and to allow these new opportunities. They have to be as efficient and productive as possible.

Government Orders

The red tape reduction act is one way to help businesses to do just that. Enshrining the one-for-one rule in law recognizes that if Canadian businesses are to play their A game, we need to take away as many barriers to competitiveness as possible.

I am very pleased and privileged to have been a part of this process, the Red Tape Reduction Commission, the recommendations that we put forward and to move forward with both legislation and the many important changes that have been made in every department in government.

• (1515)

I look forward, and I hope that all members of the House will see fit to support this legislation.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we move forward day to day with small, medium, and large businesses, we see the opportunity she indicated in the growth through the free trade agreements that we are working on and through the enhancement of education and training opportunities, whether they are through Red Seal trades or other specific programs to engage the Canadian workforce.

One of the things that will help businesses match employers and workers, and move forward and take advantage of these trade agreements, is not being bogged down in red tape and bureaucratic mechanisms that take up an inordinate amount of time and attention for those businesses.

I am just wondering, at a very local level, if the member could talk to us about some of the things she hears directly in her riding that would benefit smaller businesses through this one-for-one rule and through the broader concept of red tape reduction that our government is introducing.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, we talked about how small businesses are the economic engine. I am going to give an example in my riding. It is Country Prime Meats, and it makes pepperoni sticks that go across Canada. It also has a bit of an international market for its product.

It is a very successful business but, to be frank, if it has to spend a lot of time dealing with issues that are not critical to operating its business and expanding the business, it really takes away from the success of the business and doing what is most important. I can use the Canada Revenue Agency and the My Business Account as an example of what has been an enormous support for this company in terms of being able to interact and ask questions online, and not having to spend inordinate amounts of time on the phone.

That is just one example of where they are now taking their time to focus on the expansion of the business.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech.

I was not the best math student during elementary and high school. However, when the government makes one regulation and eliminates another, the one-for-one rule—as it is commonly known in this bill—is applied. If each time the government makes a new

regulation it eliminates another one, I believe that there are still just as many regulations. There is no reduction in red tape.

Why is my colleague talking about reducing red tape when the one-for-one rule simply means that there are just as many regulations as before? The number of regulations will not increase, fortunately, but it will not decrease either. Can she expand on that?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate that point. It was said in jest to me a little bit earlier that the businesses would have preferred a two-for-one. Ultimately, that would get them down to no regulations.

What we do recognize is that there are some that are very important in terms of health and safety. Obviously, it does not preclude departments from looking at very outdated regulations as they go through the normal process and decide that some do not make sense anymore. Certainly, it does not preclude that, but it is a really great step in the right direction.

The more important piece is the focus on the actual regulatory burden, as opposed to just the numbers, so that we are really looking at how much workload a regulation creates.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today and discuss the bill at hand. I want to touch on a point that the member from the NDP brought up in his last question. It is not a criticism at all, but rather a different way of looking at it.

The member asked a question with respect to the size of the regulations not decreasing but staying the same. I would argue the opposite, because the whole premise is that every time someone within the public service has a new idea about a regulation, there is a regulation that has to be eliminated within a certain period of time. What I think we are all asking the public service to do is work with business and ask what else it can do or ask where in the stacks of outdated regulations it could either thin out regulations or get rid of them altogether.

The most important principle behind the whole idea of rationalizing regulations is the protection of the public, the environment, and the economy. When we look at that, it should put all Canadians at ease—taxpayers and the people who are concerned about the environment, as well as businesses that are concerned not only with the environment but with their business at hand.

I grew up in a small business. I worked in a large business and then a small to medium-size business during my working career. Anyone who has spent any time working in business understands that there is quite a substantial regulatory burden, whether with respect to the tax code or any of the other federal regulations. I say federal because these are federal regulations at hand. They are quite significant, to say the least.

Government Orders

To bring one point forward where we can see huge benefits, I will draw a parallel to the Veterans Affairs VIP program, albeit not a regulation, which provides services to veterans in and around their home and property. Most parliamentarians would know that, prior to April 3, 2012, veterans had to submit invoices for all of that work. That involved 100,000-plus veterans and equalled millions of dollars of transactions per year. If we calculate the costs of completing those transactions, in some cases I am sure it was close to the costs of writing the cheques to the veterans to compensate them for their expenses. Accordingly, in April 2012, the then minister of veterans affairs brought forth a policy that was well received by veterans and all parliamentarians because it recognized that this outdated rule, which was very expensive to administer, no longer served the purpose of its original intention.

Therefore, while we were looking at ideas for savings during that period of fiscal constraint, it cut costs as well as reducing labour and burden on the department so that those civil servants could spend more time serving veterans, and the veterans received their money more quickly than before. It was a win-win situation. The people inside the department who work hard on behalf of veterans were able to look at new ways to provide better services to veterans. That is a great and simple example.

When the public service is tasked with finding improvements and savings, in some cases it is also working with business, so both parties are working together to find a good solution that would cut costs. There are people out there who say that they have heard what we are saying about principles but that there has to be something here.

• (1525)

In fact, I go back to my days when I worked for an automotive parts manufacturer, in the finance department, and it was looking at all the different processes. We were going through the same kind of fiscal constraint that the federal government has, and the finance department was tasked to go through each and every step in the financial process, with consultants, and to find waste, to find areas that were not key to delivering the financial reports, the payments, the receivables every month, year-end or whatever it would be. I can remember, as clear as day, and I will remember this to my last breath, that in the accounts payable department the consultant came out and said he thought we could go from four people to two people if we cut out all the wasteful steps. Years before that, I had worked in that area and wondered if that was possible.

It had been happening that people came to work each and every day and did the job they were assigned to do, but then times were tighter and they looked at what they were doing. No one had been looking at the reports they were generating in this example, and if they did look at them they were not reacting to them, so they were of no value to the company. Within a matter of a few months, the company went from four people to two people in the accounts payable department, and it was actually able to produce virtually the same result, which was to be able to complete the month-end in a timely manner, ensure that people who were owed money got paid, and reconcile everything at the end of the month. It went from four people to two people and covered four factories in doing so.

That is the kind of example of wasting money by doing things that do not add value, although it is a business example, and all Canadians who have been involved in businesses can appreciate it. That is what we are trying to do with these regulations.

We are trying to protect the environment, there is no doubt. We are trying to protect the economy. We are trying to protect people's safety in the workplace. However, we are also saying that, if they have an idea or concept that is going to save regulatory burden, they should please help us out.

This is one example that they have listed here. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has modernized the Northwest Territories mining regulations and the Nunavut mining regulations. This is estimated to result in annual savings for businesses of almost \$620,000. It is not \$620 million, but we would all agree that in business \$620,000 is a lot of money. It can allow them to do more R and D, buy new machinery, invest in a plant and equipment, and so on. It is vitally important.

The Prime Minister is quoted and is on record, as I am sure many others are, as saying that regulations, when they do not make sense and when they do not help, are "...a hidden tax and a silent killer of jobs".

This has been in effect since April 1, 2012. It has been a rule. Now we are putting it in through legislation to make it a law. It would be great if all the provinces, territories, and municipalities took a long, hard look at having similar rules first and then enacting legislation. As many mazes as there are through federal regulations, there are almost equal numbers of regulations in provinces, counties, municipalities, and cities that for some reason made sense at one time but no longer make sense today.

Looking at the ease of paying tax, there was a study called "Paying Taxes 2014" that found that a business in Canada takes 25% less time than a business in the United States to prepare, file, and pay its taxes each year. That is important because, when business owners are looking at filing their business taxes, it is a huge cost. There are businesses involved in each province and businesses coast to coast and businesses that conduct themselves in various different jurisdictions around the world. If business is growing, those costs are pretty amazing and it is difficult to put a financial team together to help cover the costs. The easier we can make it to file and prepare taxes and also be audited at the other end, the more attractive it is for businesses to invest in Canada and remain in Canada.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

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I would like to expand on what I was saying earlier, because I have read the provisions in Bill C-21. I said that the one-for-one rule would not necessarily reduce red tape, it would just control it. Bill C-21 is titled “An Act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses”, and the short title is the “Red Tape Reduction Act”.

I have a hard time with the fact that those two terms are used in the same bill. I am wondering which of the two is more appropriate. Does the government want to control the burden or reduce it? The title and the short title say two different things.

Could my colleague tell us which title is more appropriate? What were the Conservatives really trying to say when they drafted this bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I have never been one to get worried about titles, and certainly from where I sit in the House of Commons, it is a good thing.

However, I will tell the member that as of June 14, we have had a net annual reduction of more than \$22 million in administrative burden on business, an estimated annual savings of 290,000 hours in time spent dealing with regulatory red tape, and a net reduction of 19 federal regulations taken off the books.

I think those three points answer the question for the member.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Huron—Bruce for his speech. He did just point out, quite accurately, that the rule he mentioned in his address has been in place since 2012, fulfilling a throne speech commitment made then and reaffirmed in 2013, and was introduced during the Canadian Federation of Independent Business Red Tape Awareness Week.

As the member for Huron—Bruce has pointed out, there has been a reduction of over \$22 million, an estimated savings of 290,000 hours, and a net benefit of 19 federal regulations taken off the books.

From his perspective as a small business owner in the past, would the member for Huron—Bruce talk about what that means in terms of connecting employers with job seekers, what that means for growth of businesses, and what that means in return to a community or a region or a province when there is less time spent on navigating the quagmire of paperwork and regulation?

• (1535)

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I could give the member one example that would go back, I believe, two years, dealing with the number of times a business would have to file its EI payments and its CPP payments. That requirement went from monthly to quarterly. That alone is significant.

Although it may seem very simplistic, we can quantify it out that if there are several thousand employees, it is a lot. It is a lot of cash flow to manage, and being able file on a quarterly timeframe instead of a monthly timeframe would be significant.

Of course, we could go on for hours about regulations around agriculture, which would be in my area.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-21, an act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses, but let me make it clear that we are supporting it at second reading so that when it goes to committee, we can bring forward robust amendments. In the way it is being explained, the intention of the bill may sound good, but we believe there are major flaws and we believe these flaws could actually make it harder for small businesses, rather than easier.

The other thing is that I am always very nervous whenever I hear talk about getting rid of red tape, whether it is from the Liberal government in B.C. or the Conservative government here in Ottawa. I always wonder what the real agenda is and what the real issues are, because getting rid of red tape back in B.C. meant that hundreds and thousands of children who were designated special needs and therefore eligible for additional services lost those designations. That was considered getting rid of red tape and just simplifying things.

One of my other major concerns comes down to having very little trust in the current government to actually do what it says. Over and over again, I have seen MPs on the other side granting more and more power to ministers. That is also a major flaw in this piece of legislation. In this bill, just as in many immigration bills we have looked at in the past, we see a growing amount of power being vested in the hands of the minister so that actions can be taken without any parliamentary oversight, either through debate in the House or through debate in committee. That is very dangerous for our parliamentary democracy.

The whole idea of having parliamentarians here is so that we can have informed debates and bring forward amendments and move forward that way. The government talks about accountability and transparency but places more and more power in the hands of ministers, so very little comes to the House to be debated. When an issue does come to the House to be debated, Conservatives cannot bear the light to be shone on it or for real debate to break out, because at that time they move either closure or time restriction. All kinds of procedural angles are taken to cut off debate.

Before I get into talking about the bill itself, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to say that Sikhs in my riding of Newton—North Delta, which is one of the largest Sikh communities in Canada, are celebrating the Parkash, or the birth of Guru Nanak Sahib Ji, and Gurburab, along with Sikhs across our wonderful land from coast to coast to coast and Sikhs around the world. I want to wish all Sikhs celebrating this momentous occasion the very best. It is also a time when we reflect on the teaching that Guru Nanak Sahib Ji left for us, which was about doing service and about the value of honest work. It was about the value of sharing and building healthy communities. I do wish anyone who is celebrating this day, all the Sikhs around the world, happy Gurburab day.

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To get back to this legislation, it is very important to me and to my riding, which is spread along all the many arterial routes in Surrey.

• (1540)

I have a community that is made up of a huge number of small businesses. Entrepreneurs have come to this country, have made it their home, and through their hard work have added much to the tapestry of our Canadian way of life.

I hear from the business community constantly of the major challenges they face. Therefore, if the bill before us can reduce the bureaucratic requirements and the endless sheets of paper they have to fill out, of course we would want to do that.

I also hear from the small and medium-sized businesses that there are other things that would make their lives a lot easier. One of those things is an idea that we have been putting forward, which so far my colleagues across the way have not really heard. I do not know if those members are talking to the small and medium-sized businesses in their communities, because if they were, they would be hearing the same thing that I am hearing, which is that what is killing many of the small businesses is the transaction fees on credit and debit cards.

Just the other day, I pulled out my credit card to pay, but the business person told me that they only took cash or cheques. I was not buying a huge amount and I do not tend to carry cash, but as soon as he said that, I was reminded of how mindlessly we use credit cards. We forget that when we do a transaction that may be worth three or four dollars, the transaction fee that the businessman has to pay for processing the credit card is huge. For that small businessman in Toronto, that fee really cuts into the profit margin. As this businessman told me, it actually cuts into his ability to survive month to month.

I think that if we really want to help the small and medium-sized businesses, we should look at examples. We are so good at quoting England, the U.S., Australia, and other countries when we want to go to war, but let us take a look at some of their economic policies as well.

In Australia, if my memory serves me right, the transaction fee for a credit card is 0.6%. That is a huge difference from what some of our businesses pay, which is anywhere from 3% up to 6%. Of course, it all depends on the kind of credit card we are using.

We can just imagine—

• (1545)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. minister of state.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I apologize to my colleague, but I was here to listen to the debate on red tape reduction. I appreciate that the member has issues. We have heard them many times before. I am not certain that we have changed the subject of the debate, but there is a time, and that is why we have these debates.

The NDP members are very eager to have their time for debate, as we have heard many times. However, I encourage the Speaker to ensure the member's remarks remain relevant to the debate at hand. That is why we have this debate time.

The Deputy Speaker: I must admit that I was sharing the concern of the minister of state. However, I did not know if the member was

driving toward the issue before the House right now around regulations. If she is, then I would allow her to continue. If she is not and is off on the issue of the percentages being charged on credit cards, she is on a point of irrelevancy.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the point that you have made, but I am setting the context. The context is that we have a government that purports to want to help small and medium-sized businesses. The reduction of red tape, especially if it is useless red tape, and regulations would help them, as would the other issue that I raised. I was just using it as another example in the way of educating my colleagues across the way.

What I hear from owners of small and medium-sized businesses is that they hear a lot from government and members of Parliament in their ridings and all across Canada about how much they want to support small and medium-sized businesses, but the owners often tell me that what the government says it is going to do does not always end up helping them or tackling the real issues.

We are looking at the track record of how the government has managed this in the past. Being New Democrats, very practical and down to earth people, of course we want to support any common sense solutions. Common sense should prevail. We want to use those common sense solutions to reduce the paper burden and compliance costs small businesses face when dealing with government. We absolutely want to do that.

We also want to assist small businesses and support the government by eliminating unnecessary red tape and allowing them to focus on what they do best, which is growing their businesses and creating jobs. We know that small and medium-sized businesses are the engines of Canada's economy. I always say that when people shop locally and invest in small and medium-sized businesses and when we make it easier for them by taking away a lot of the bureaucracy, they are the ones that grow jobs. They are the ones that hire people from the community and the people they hire then spend and put money back into the community, and the economic engine is invigorated. We absolutely need that.

It is said that the devil is in the details, and once again, there are details in this bill that are causing New Democrats concern. I mentioned it at the beginning, but let me stress it again. Bill C-21 would give the President of the Treasury Board arbitrary powers that would make him the arbiter of eliminating regulations that he deems unnecessary.

There are colleagues across the way who seem to have an allergy to science, data, experts or the people who actually do the work. I would say that in order to do this, we need to consult and engage the small business community so that they have a say in this, not to have a minister go behind closed doors and do some kind of pseudo-consultation online, talking to his buddies or the people who give him money. That is the not the kind of consultation or partnership needed as we move forward on such an important issue.

Government Orders

The other thing is that there are the important critical areas of the health and safety of Canadians and there is nothing specifically in the bill that says this bill does not apply to those regulations. It is mentioned briefly in the preamble, but I am always concerned when things are in preambles due to what I did in my other life, because things in preambles are just that, a kind of lead-up. However, those are the kinds of things we need enshrined in the bill. Health and safety are absolutely critical and nobody should be more conscious of that than members of Parliament after having seen what played out over the last few weeks and especially this week in the House.

Also, in the bill there is absolutely no mention of environmental issues. I know that a lot of my colleagues in the House across the way are in denial about climate change, but we are getting dire warnings in new reports coming out that the time to act is now and the time to talk is over. Therefore, there had better be something in the bill to address environmental protections as well.

● (1550)

I believe many of my colleagues across the way are absolutely serious about the health and safety of Canadians. I know some of them. I have worked on committees with some of them. They do care about the health and safety of Canadians, and they do care about the environment. I would urge them to urge that part of the House to accept our amendments, but also to bring forward changes themselves so that the health and safety of Canadians is an integral part of the bill, as well as the environmental issues.

Sometimes we talk about regulation and getting rid of red tape. Red tape is always a bit of a downer. No one ever wants red tape, the useless paperwork. At the same time, we have to remember that some regulations are good.

I am very nervous when the minister has that kind of arbitrary power, that on a whim, from a lobbyist pressuring him or her, what could happen in the future is deregulation occurring in areas where it should not. I do not want anyone to stand up and say that would never happen. We have seen that happen in this House, over and over again.

We are not the only ones saying this. Many people talk about the red tape irritants, and of course we want to get rid of those. We want to focus on growth and innovation. As parliamentarians, it behooves us to make sure that we do all of those things.

The government adopted a red tape reduction action plan that outlines 90 actions to be taken by government departments and six systemic reforms, including the implementation of the one-for-one rule. This guideline would require the government to eliminate one regulation for every new regulation it adopts. I think that is so that we do not run short of storage space, which would happen if we just keep adding regulations and never take any away.

Buried in this, is the fact that we have to look at which regulations actually do good and are there for the public good and to the protect businessmen, and which are not.

There are many things in the bill alone that will create more bureaucracy. The bill mandates a review after five years, thus triggering more administrative red tape. Then of course we will need the red tape police, and the red tape police will have to oversee those things.

I was looking at some of the failures that we have seen when regulation is looked at in such a limited way that all regulation is seen as just being in the way. What we are saying is that now is the time for a real consultation.

In the coming months, the NDP small business critic will be launching a national consultation with representatives of small businesses. That is the kind of parliamentary work we need. Young entrepreneurs and family businesses are key to a prosperous economic future for Canada. New Democrats will make sure that we focus on practical, common sense solutions to help them succeed. We are not going to do that by sitting here in Parliament. We are going to do that when we listen to those on whom our legislation is going to have a direct impact, in this case, the business community.

Only recently a businessman was telling me how much the hiring credit for small business in the 2014 budget would have helped him, but of course that is not there. When it comes to taking real action, my colleagues across the way just talk. Then we see this bill being rushed through.

I want to talk a little about the Conservatives' track record when it comes to safeguarding regulations and protecting the health and safety of Canadians. I say that because those are not protected explicitly in the legislation.

● (1555)

Let us just look at the Canadian aviation regulations when WestJet lobbied and got its staff to passenger ratios changed, just at a whim like that. That is what really scares me more than anything else, that the minister is going to be so prone to these lobbyists that will come forward. Of course, the Liberals do not have a clean record on this either because in 1999 the Liberals deregulated rail safety by continuing to implement the safety management systems approach adopted by Mulroney's Conservative government. They did not start it, but they did not stop it either.

We have seen some of those things happen, so finally and absolutely let us look at making it easier for small and medium-sized businesses to function but let us look at the full story on how we can support them.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. She gave a good overview of all of the issues and problems facing small and medium-sized businesses these days. I know that she talks a lot with SMEs in her riding, and she is well aware of the concerns of business owners in her region.

My question has to do with self-regulation. As she pointed out, there is nothing concrete in the bill to protect the health and safety of Canadians. There is no mention of the environment. She said that we cannot trust this Conservative government to protect Canadians.

I know that the NDP will support this bill, but we will study it in committee and propose amendments.

What does the member think this bill needs to adequately protect the health and safety of Canadians?

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[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her thoughtful question. They cannot put health and safety and the environment in a preamble and think they have done their job. That is just a huge travesty.

“Rules that are necessary to protect health, promote safety and protect the environment are important”; that was said by Laura Jones of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

It is not just the NDP saying this. This is being said by the independent business association as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She does indeed seem very aware of the concerns of small and medium-sized businesses. That is a good thing. Most of our colleagues are in close contact with small and medium-sized businesses, since they deal with them every day as part of their jobs as members of Parliament.

I get the impression that this bill is a smokescreen more than anything else, especially since, as I mentioned earlier, it will not necessarily reduce red tape. The bill will limit it, which is a good thing.

However, in its public communications, the government spoke about reduction, when ultimately this bill will only limit the administrative burden for small and medium-sized businesses.

Does the member think that the government was truly sincere in its communications with the public when it said that this would reduce red tape? This measure will effectively have little impact and will simply limit, at best, the administrative burden that companies have to deal with.

• (1600)

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague that I know that our critic will be going forward with amendments to ensure the bill does what it purports to do or what I am being told it is going to do. However, we have colleagues across the way who do not have a good track record on reducing the paper burden.

Let us look at what the Conservatives did with the building Canada fund. Rather than helping municipalities and SMEs start infrastructure projects within reasonable time frames, the Conservatives implemented a long and cumbersome bureaucratic process for all projects over \$100 million. The new screening requirements will add delays from six to 18 months and will delay important projects. This is their idea of speeding things up.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this bill deals with certain rules that are being applied. My colleague mentioned some of the concerns she has about leaving some of the powers in the hands of the government in terms of deciding which bills or regulations to set aside. She raised some concerns regarding the environment, safety, and security. I would ask my colleague to give us some examples of the concerns she has regarding this bill.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, there is not enough time for me to tabulate all the concerns I have with respect to this bill, but these are some of my key concerns.

My first is with respect to the inordinate amount of power being put arbitrarily in the hands of a minister, without any parliamentary oversight.

Second is the fact that health, safety, and environmental issues are in the preamble.

What is more critical is that I have no trust in my colleagues across the way to deliver a system in which paperwork would be reduced, because every time they have tried to do that, it has led to disastrous consequences. Either there have been huge delays, or when they have deregulated in other areas, we have had some tragic consequences.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech.

The purpose of this bill is to reduce paperwork, and obviously, it is important to give business people some relief from the administrative burden, but we still think it is important to have strong guarantees to protect regulations governing Canadians' health and safety.

Can my colleague comment on that?

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. We sit on a committee together, and I will say that her constituents are fortunate to have her as their member of Parliament. She does an amazing job on the committee.

I believe I said this in my speech. Sometimes we see rules and regulations as a bad thing. However, if we did not have rules about how we drive, we would have a disaster on our freeways. Not all rules are bad.

Robyn Benson, the national president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, said:

Regulations, and their proper enforcement, can literally save lives. But sometimes only a horrific mishap will make the point—and even then, not always.

Let me remind the House that we do not support regulations that serve no purpose and just create work. However, there are regulations we do support. Health and safety issues and environmental protections are regulations that should be in the body of this legislation and not there as an afterthought in the preamble.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about this in her speech, but can she confirm that she thinks, as I do, that regulations can be beneficial and that there have to be some rules?

I am thinking of the deregulation we have seen in rail safety. Deregulation has happened in many other sectors too. As we have seen, when companies are allowed to self-regulate, their systems are very often flawed.

Government Orders

Does she think that deregulation can go too far and that if we let deregulation go too far and let companies self-regulate, that can be dangerous for Canadians and our society?

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is a person in this House who would not agree that we need rules and regulations, but we need rules and regulations that make sense. We need to ensure that health and security and safety are preserved. This week we have seen an example of what happens when we do not have processes in place.

The other thing I will say is that we cannot demonize the idea of regulations, because without regulations, health and safety are threatened.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to discuss Bill C-21, An Act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses. I will be sharing my time with the member for Sherbrooke.

To listen to the government, and at first glance, this bill seems interesting. The idea of reducing paperwork is important. Before I was elected, I owned a small business and was the only employee. Therefore, I understand that it is important to reduce the amount of paperwork, the forms and procedures for people in business so that they can concentrate on their work.

As an elected official, I spoke with representatives of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal and chambers of commerce on Montreal's south shore. I know that this issue especially affects the business world and small businesses. Business people would not have to waste their time filling out forms and doing the administrative tasks of their companies and instead could look after their business and improve their bottom line, as that is often their objective.

However, we must not forget our responsibilities as legislators. I do not want to generalize, but deregulation seems to be the goal of the Conservative government and the Liberals. They are always saying that the market will take care of itself.

For example, in terms of rail safety, the Liberals first privatized everything to do with railways without putting in place regulations to protect Canadians, and that practice continued under the Conservatives. Unfortunately, we saw what happened at Lac-Mégantic.

Let us return to the bill before us, as that is the reason why I am rising today. I will talk about the one-for-one rule. This means that the government will eliminate one regulation for every new regulation it introduces. This rule is rather arbitrary, but we understand its objective. This would stop the government from introducing more and more regulations.

I will once again use rail safety as an example. I often use that, because I am the NDP transport critic, and we are all well aware of the problems caused by deregulation. In committee, the Liberals are still saying that private companies should be allowed to set their own regulations. They believe that companies should use common sense, and then it would follow that everyone would be safe. Of course, the

government says the same thing, and says so loud and clear through the measures it adopts.

The goal of the one-for-one rule seems positive. However, it is troubling that the government is granting itself the power to put a regulation in place—yet another one—that allows it to set certain rules aside and decide how it wants to proceed. This gives more powers to the ministers.

Basically, I am worried about how this government manages regulations, particularly when it comes to rail safety, but also regarding food inspection. The government has a strong tendency to allow companies to self-regulate, and this creates situations like the XL Foods crisis, which led to one of the biggest food recalls in Canada.

Another concern is that the bill seems to lump everything together, without taking important public safety regulations into consideration.

•(1610)

As my colleague said, when we talk about safety, we are also talking about the environment and health. Should we put everything in the same basket? The government would say that this bill does not affect health and safety, because it has to do with reducing red tape for small and medium-sized businesses. Unfortunately, that is not written in the bill, only in the preamble. As a lawyer who studied and practised in this area, I know that the preamble is supposed to give us an idea of the legislator's intention, but why is this idea not found in the bill itself?

The government simply wants to adopt a measure to remove a rule every time a new rule is introduced. In light of the study conducted by the Standing Committee on Transport following the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, we know that railway safety regulations are inadequate. Since those events, the government has been introducing measures to make up for its inaction and that of previous Liberal governments.

In that case, we are talking about new regulations. If it is not written in Bill C-21, does that mean that according to the government's one-for-one rule, for every new regulation, another regulation that protects public safety will be removed? For example, we could talk about the phase-out of the DOT-111 tank cars.

We will ask questions, since we do in fact support the idea behind this bill at second reading stage. I have worked in business and I know what a burden red tape and forms can be and how much time is spent on administration instead of work.

I absolutely support the principle, but we must find the right way to go about this. I am especially concerned about the powers being given to the minister. This will be part of the concerns we will raise. I will support the bill at second reading, but studies will have to be done.

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The NDP is often criticized for opposing everything, but that is not the case. Having been a member of several House committees, I know that we often, if not always, put forward proposals. However, the government, which holds the majority in the House and in committees, constantly rejects the proposals, even though they improve the bill in order to help Canadians and small businesses. There is concern that the government will not lend its support.

Since we are talking about proposals, I want to step away from the bill for a moment. However, my comments will still be relevant. We have talked about credit card fees. I met with people from my riding so they could sign letters to the former finance minister. They wanted him to be aware of their concerns. They were business people who work hard to earn a living. Unfortunately, once again, since the government does not really like to regulate, it adopted a measure that allows credit card companies to act voluntarily.

In the interests of small businesses, some regulations need to be made. However, the government is not listening to us and does not agree.

• (1615)

When this is referred to committee and the NDP and Liberals make proposals, we hope that the government will listen to us.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have noticed a trend lately in the bills coming from the Conservatives, and I am not the only one. Their bills always give ministers more powers. As my colleague mentioned earlier, in this case, the President of the Treasury Board will be granted more powers.

I would like to ask him whether he thinks this is acceptable and whether it is good for a healthy and democratic administration in our country.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Hochelaga for asking the question. In fact, it is a concern for us. Quite frankly, being in the opposition and seeing how the Conservative government acts day after day, I find it sometimes disconcerting to see how it is managing security and the regulations that affect Canadians.

Again, it is a question of putting more power in the hands of a single person. In this case, that person is the President of the Treasury Board. He can develop guidelines, single-handedly determine how the rule will be applied—I am referring to the one-for-one rule—and he can make regulations on his own. That takes us, here in the House, out of the equation. As legislators, it is up to us to determine which laws and regulations are the best ones to implement.

We know that the Conservative government has the tendency to want to do less. It wants to take the government out of the business of ensuring that people are safe. It wants to put everything in the hands of one person. The government wants to be able to self-regulate. That is a laissez-faire approach and it is worrisome.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard the comment that the minister should not be awarded the authority to make these simple regulatory changes. Does the

member actually think it is in the best interests of small business to bring each of the thousands of regulatory changes into this chamber so that we can sit here and debate each and every one of the thousands for five hours each?

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the minister of state. The goal is not necessarily to bring all the regulations here. I think the minister of state knows how things are in terms of legislation, so that was not the intent of my comment. My comment was about the fact that we are giving a lot of powers to the President of the Treasury Board and we are giving a lot of powers in terms of putting forward how we are going to apply this rule, how we are going to apply the bill. That is the concern. It is not necessarily in terms of looking at all the regulations. The minister of state knows that is not what we do here in the House.

However, the bill is giving more power to a minister and that is the tendency we have seen from the start when I first came to the House in 2011. We are seeing more and more power given to individual ministers in order to do what they want to do. That is what we have been saying from the start when the government keeps coming out with omnibus bills. It is a way for the government to take more power and do as it pleases. That is the concern. Members of Parliament have to make sure that we hold the government accountable and when we give all the power to a single individual, that is a concern for us.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for their warm reception.

I am pleased to be speaking to Bill C-21 today, in part as the member for the beautiful riding of Sherbrooke and in part as the chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which will be responsible for studying Bill C-21 when the time comes.

I would like to begin by reassuring my colleagues. I will be sharing my views on the bill. However, that will not affect my ability to be impartial as we study the bill in committee. As chair of the committee, I must remain neutral during debates and possible amendments during the clause-by-clause stage. I simply want to reassure those colleagues who will discern from my speech that I have a few opinions on the bill.

After reading the bill, I had the impression that it was more of a smokescreen than anything else, which I will explain. The premise behind this bill was first announced in the throne speech in 2012, a couple of years ago. The government reaffirmed it in 2013. All that to say that the government talks about this often, but it took a while to come up with a bill.

I think it is also a smokescreen in terms of its contents. It seems to me that this is merely a way for the government to boast about reducing red tape and doing something for small business owners, when really, the bill actually does very little in that regard. That is why I feel that the bill is more of a smokescreen than anything else and that it allows the government to brag about being a champion of small business.

Government Orders

If we look at the Conservatives' record, it is clear that the reality is quite the opposite. This is a nice way for the government to talk about this, but there are gaps when it comes to taking action.

First of all, even the title of the bill shows that it lacks consistency. The official long title is An Act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses, while the short title is the Red Tape Reduction Act. There is a contradiction there.

I am sure people will ask me if there really is a difference between the words “control” and “reduce” or if they really are opposites. Perhaps they are not opposites, according to the dictionary definition. Nevertheless, I do think there is a difference between “control” and “reduce”. In my view, when you control something, it can still increase, but it increases as little as possible, but when you reduce something, you end up with a smaller amount, and that is obviously one way of moving towards fewer regulations. However, both terms are used in the bill.

Why—

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister of State for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting the member, but I have been sitting here for this entire debate and that is exactly the same speech I have now heard three times. I encourage people watching this debate to compare the subject matter and the exact language of this speech. This is wasting the time of members in the chamber. This might be a good argument as to why we inflict time allocation. This is an important matter. If there is something new to add, I would like to hear it so we can debate it, but this is the third time I have heard this speech.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that is a point of order. There is certainly no issue, from the observations I have made, of relevancy. It is certainly on topic with the bill that is before the House.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke can continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his intervention. He seems to be a little sensitive. I just want to say that my notes are all handwritten. I have not sent them to anyone in the House. I have been here since the debate began at 3 p. m., and I am the only one to have pointed out those two terms in the bill. I am surprised by what the member said, but I thank him for his intervention all the same. I will try to be more original, and I hope that he will pay attention to what I have to say. It is important to have debate in the House. My colleague seems to be suggesting that imposing time allocation will enhance debate. I completely disagree with that. It is important for every member of Parliament to have an opportunity to express his or her opinion. That way, as we move through the process, we all know what the others think. That moves the debate forward.

In the time I have left, I would like to continue with my examination of Bill C-21 and the terms used therein. That slowed me down a little, which is a shame, because I had a lot to say.

Another thing I noticed has to do with the preamble. My colleague spoke about this and probably did a better job than I could, so I will not cover that portion of my speech. However, when a judge has to interpret the provisions of an act, the preamble has absolutely no effect or legal value. My colleague from Brossard—La Prairie did a good job covering this earlier, so I will move on to something else.

The other part of the bill that got my attention was this one-for-one rule. This had previously been announced by the government, so this rule already exists and is already applied within the departments. The rule is reinforced in the bill, since it will be enshrined in law. However, this law has no teeth and will do very little. This is clear in clause 8:

8. (1) No action or other proceeding may be brought against Her Majesty in right of Canada for anything done or omitted to be done, or for anything purported to be done or omitted to be done, under this Act.

(2) No regulation is invalid by reason only of a failure to comply with this Act.

This means that the one-for-one rule that the government just put in a bill will have no effect, since if this one-for-one rule—which will become law when this bill passes—is violated, there will be no consequences. If a department decides to make a new regulation and does not eliminate another one, there are no legal consequences. As a result, departments will not be bound by this law, since there are two provisions protecting them and giving them immunity if they do not abide by the law.

This proves once again that this bill is a smokescreen. This is a way for the government to say that it is a champion of small business.

The ultimate irony here is that the government has created six opportunities to increase the number of regulations with this bill. Clause 7 creates five opportunities for the minister to make regulations. The same goes for clause 10. It will be argued that the regulations in this bill do not apply to businesses, but I find it rather ironic to see that in a bill designed to reduce red tape, the government has included six provisions enabling the minister to create more.

I will be very pleased to take questions from my colleagues.

• (1630)

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech. I learned a lot of things that we have not heard today.

After listening to his speech, I get the feeling that my colleague is quite close to the SMEs in his riding and that he is well aware of their needs.

I would like to know whether he thinks it is important to alleviate the administrative burden on SMEs. Will this bill achieve that goal?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Will the bill achieve that goal? I doubt it. Five years after the bill is passed, I would like to poll the SMEs and ask whether they have felt a decrease in the administrative burden since Bill C-21 passed. I am very curious and I will try to remember to go see the SMEs and ask them that because I highly doubt that this bill will have a significant impact.

Government Orders

It is important and it should have a significant impact because SMEs play a key role in our communities. In Sherbrooke, they are major employers. It is important to encourage them in many ways. Reducing red tape for them will give them more time to invest money in the expansion, visibility and growth of their business.

As members of Parliament and Canadian citizens, we must support our small and medium-sized businesses every day.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would my colleague be interested in amending the bill at committee in such a way that any administrative burdens that would be added in a particular sector would be compensated by removals in the same sector?

We know that in the first year and a half or so, since the one-for-one rule went into effect, three-quarters of the regulatory reductions have come from the health sector. However, there have been more regulatory burdens in other sectors, particularly in natural resources and transportation.

Would business owners not feel more secure if they knew that the bill did not permit the regulatory burden to go up for them only to be offset by reductions in some other sector where they were not involved?

It seems more fair that way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague.

There is room for clarification in this bill. As it is only two or three pages long, there could be some clarification. I am obviously not in a position to propose an amendment as I will be chairing the committee meetings. That will not be part of my role.

I will be very pleased to help out during the debate by doing the job of chair to the best of my abilities and trying to have all parties reach an agreement. I believe that the goal in committee is to do important work, work that is productive and moves things along. I believe that committee chairs have a role to play by achieving consensus among the members and ensuring that amendments to bills are adopted, even those proposed by the government. I believe that this is possible. We must be open to all possibilities when studying a bill in committee. I hope that all my colleagues, whether or not they belong to my party, will raise important points during the debate and perhaps propose amendments.

I am very interested in seeing what happens with this bill and participating in the next debate.

● (1635)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must say that I find the Conservatives' attempts to intimidate members on this side of the House who are giving speeches to be rather deplorable. I know that my colleague is strong enough not to be intimidated.

He spoke about missing measures and the Conservatives' less than stellar record. I would have liked to hear him talk about the measures missing from this bill.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed that we have not heard much from members on the other side of the House. I would be very happy to hear what they have to say. Unfortunately we heard only two speeches. Still, I would be very interested in hearing my colleague's opinion rather than hear him tell other members that what they have to say is not relevant. I would prefer to hear him explain his position.

Since my time is almost up, I want to say that this bill is missing a few things, including teeth and impact. As written, it has neither. That is missing. Once passed, the bill will have no teeth. There will be no way to ensure compliance because the departments will be able to use the immunity clause in the bill. I think that is a real flaw that we will probably have to work on correcting.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that I will share my time with my hon. colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-21, An Act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses. Those who have been following the debate so far know that Bill C-21 is supposed to reduce administrative headaches and the administrative burden for businesses.

However, what it will really do is give the President of the Treasury Board the power to decide which regulations to eliminate. I would like to draw your attention to some of the more important clauses in this bill. I would like to read clause 5(1) of the bill:

5.(1) If a regulation is made that imposes a new administrative burden on a business, one or more regulations must be amended or repealed to offset the cost of that new burden against the cost of an existing administrative burden on a business.

That is essentially one of the most important clauses in the bill. I would also like to draw your attention to clause 6, which states that:

6. The President of the Treasury Board may establish policies or issue directives respecting the manner in which section 5 is to be applied.

Basically, that sums up what I just said about the President of the Treasury Board's new powers.

I will begin by underscoring the importance of small and medium-sized businesses in our Canadian economy. I would also like to say that I support this bill to reduce red tape for SMEs. It deserves to be studied in committee. In this debate, other members proposed amendments that can be presented in committee later. This bill is not perfect, but it is worth studying.

It should be noted that SMEs are at the heart of our local economy. I can attest to that because I have talked to small business owners in my riding, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. I have seen how SMEs are the cornerstone of the vitality and prosperity of our community.

This summer, I toured the SMEs in my riding to get an idea of their concerns and to find out what the federal government could do to help them. Reducing red tape was one concern raised by the SMEs in my region.

Government Orders

We must not forget that business owners create jobs, hire local workers and support our community organizations. I know this because I have personally seen how generous the business owners in my region are and how much they help our community organizations, such as the Emile- Z.-Lavolette foundation, which provides food assistance programs for children. I know that the businesses are actively involved in the community of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and their commitment is much appreciated.

My colleagues might be interested to know that over the past year, SMEs created 80% of the new jobs in the private sector in Canada. We have to admit that is a significant part of our economy. Nonetheless, we have unfortunately seen that many SMEs struggle to survive on a daily basis.

Before I continue, I would quickly like to list some other proposals and ideas that came out of my consultation with SMEs in the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles this summer. Many businesses proposed restoring the hiring credit for small businesses. In fact, that tax credit was abolished by the Conservative government in 2014.

● (1640)

They also suggested reducing SMEs' taxes. They asked the government to limit hidden fees on credit card transactions. I will digress here to mention that there was some news about these fees this week. However, credit card transaction fees in Canada are approximately 1.5%, which is twice the international average. That has taken two years, but we still have a lot of work to do to get further reductions in hidden credit card transaction fees.

SMEs in my riding also proposed creating a tax credit for hiring and training youth, which is very important because the youth unemployment rate is twice the national average. They suggested giving business owners access to financing that would foster the growth of SMEs. They also suggested reducing red tape, as I have already mentioned.

They also said that there must be support for SMEs that work on innovation. We must provide more support for research and development. In my riding, there are many innovative businesses because of the presence of the aerospace industry. There are many innovative companies working for this sector and also for other sectors.

I would like to come back to the reduction of red tape. That has already been proposed by the NDP. An NDP government would reduce red tape for businesses across Canada. The measures contained in this bill are not the only ones of interest to SMEs. There are other things we can do to reduce the administrative burden for businesses. For example, we could facilitate access to government contracts, provide more online services to businesses, make it possible for owners to sign up their companies only once for multiple government sites and provide a single-window service to start up new businesses.

These are just a few of the NDP's proposals for reducing the paper burden of SMEs. I think we have a lot of work to do in that regard. I am interested in hearing what suggestions experts will make to the committee.

I want to talk about one aspect of this bill that concerns me greatly. This bill does not contain enough protections for the health

and safety of Canadians. There is no mention of the environment in this bill, which I also find appalling. The current Conservative government relies far too much on self-inspection and self-regulation. Last week, I asked a question in the House during question period about the lack of safety inspectors for Canadian motorists. George Iny, a stakeholder in the sector, appeared before committee to tell us that there is a lack of inspectors in the auto safety sector. That worries me a lot.

I do not think that the government invested enough resources and money in the health and safety of Canadians. The bill very briefly mentions the fact that it cannot not harm public health and safety or the Canadian economy, but I think there is a way to integrate these measures and this idea into the bill itself. We know that the preamble does not necessarily hold any legal weight.

● (1645)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech.

She spoke a lot about small and medium-sized businesses in her riding, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, which is very important. Does she think that the bill will have the desired effect? The bill aims to control the administrative burden, whereas elsewhere there is talk of reducing it.

Does my colleague think that this bill will have the desired impact for businesses? In five years, will there be a noticeable reduction in red tape, or are these just empty promises from a Conservative government that is trying to win the hearts of small and medium-sized businesses?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right; the bill will have very little impact.

The measures in this bill should be combined with the NDP's proposals, which I mentioned in my speech. We need to consult with entrepreneurs to see what they want.

I was also very happy to learn that the small business critic for the NDP plans to launch national consultations in the coming months with representatives from the small business community. We have to listen to what they have to say, and I look forward to hearing the recommendations from these experts.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very impressed by everything my colleague said regarding small businesses, the tour she did in her riding and everything that came out of that.

I noted at least six suggestions that she has passed on to the federal government to help small and medium-sized businesses. One of them was reducing red tape. However, I also had the impression, since there were so many things to suggest, that small businesses saw this as a small step in the right direction, but the Conservative government still had a lot of work to do.

Is that accurate?

● (1650)

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, indeed, we have to take a global approach and a number of measures to help SMEs.

Government Orders

I would like to get back to the question from my colleague from Sherbrooke, who asked whether the bill would have a real impact. The Conservatives said that they wanted to reduce red tape, but they did the opposite with the building Canada fund.

Instead of helping municipalities and small businesses start infrastructure projects in a timely manner, the Conservatives set up a long and cumbersome bureaucratic process for every project worth more than \$100 million.

It is great that they introduced Bill C-21 to reduce the administrative burden on small businesses, but I must point out that the government is increasing red tape in other instances.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up question.

When a number of regulations are being taken away in one department, whereas in another area there is a dramatic increase in regulations, in principle does the member believe that where we reduce regulations there might be some benefit in terms of having some balance to it? Would she agree in principle that it should be within a department, or should it be broad so that it applies across all departments, so that there could be 1,000 regulations coming out of one department and 1,000 new regulations going into another? Should there be more balance?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I did not see anything in this bill that covers the member's question. That is an excellent question.

We do not know how this bill will be implemented. It could have a negative impact and create situations where there are no longer regulations in one area but there are many more in others. This could be very detrimental to businesses.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise. I thank my colleague the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for sharing her time with me.

This is an important debate, because I do not think there is anyone in the House who represents constituents, including small and medium-size businesses, who would not be in favour of removing the administrative burden that regulations can sometimes impose on businesses. That would simply be nonsensical.

As has been stated by my colleagues, we are going to be supporting this bill moving forward from second reading to committee, where we will get into more of the details and make sure that the bill does what it says it will do and that it does not create too much harm. What we have come to learn about this government is that, once we get by the language, the words, and the public relations and get into the details, often things are not what were advertised.

My colleague who spoke just before me mentioned that she had a consultation in her riding, where she was out talking with small-business people about some of the things that needed to be done. I did likewise this spring. I sent out a letter to more than 2,000 businesses in my riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour asking people for their input. I received a good response. I have to say, though, that

not a lot of them said we have to get rid of red tape. People asked why the government cancelled the hiring tax credit for small business and why it continues to create problems in employment insurance, for example.

More recently, they asked why the government so badly bungled the jobs fund. It announced that it was going to take \$500 million from the employment insurance fund and create what it said would be 25,000 jobs. Of course, the PBO quickly alerted us to the fact that its number crunching showed not 25,000 jobs but 800 jobs. It said the government would be creating jobs at a cost of \$500,000 a job.

Therefore, when business people in my constituency hear that kind of foolishness they ask “What is it with this government?” They ask if it is serious when it makes proclamations like this, that it is going to reduce the administrative burden, get rid of the red tape, and make life easier, because every time the government turns around it makes life more difficult for business in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and, frankly, across the country.

I have been around here a little while. I have been in this business since the early 90s. I went through the 90s when the Liberals, both provincial and federal, were on this kick of removing red tape. What we saw more than anything was that the Liberals here in Ottawa were moving more toward voluntary regulation. We saw this, whether it was for businesses in the food production area, businesses like pipeline companies, others that had some impact on the environment, or transportation, like rail and truck transport, and so on. They were cutting inspectors and leaving companies to their own resources to self-regulate.

We found far too often—and now we have seen it again under this government—that all it takes is one tragedy, like Lac-Mégantic, and we realize the whole business of voluntary or self-regulation just does not work. It sounds good and it is meant to make things easier for these companies, but in the final analysis it ends up creating some great hardship, not only for individuals, families, and communities but also for the economy.

● (1655)

I listened earlier to a member speaking to whether or not we want regulatory change to come through the House. A regulation can be changed without coming to this House. I have seen it ever since 2012, when the government brought in changes to the Fisheries Act that basically gutted the act in terms of its ability to protect fish habitat and provide for proper conservation.

Regulatory changes that have continued to trickle through since 2012 are having an incredibly important and negative impact on the environment. The latest was a regulation that was *Gazetted* in the spring. It would permit aquaculture companies to use deleterious substances in the water in the process of farming, whether it be salmon or other types of aquaculture. It is a serious problem. That change might make it easier for the aquaculture companies that are operating those businesses, but to traditional fisheries, environmentalists, and people who are worried about water quality and the environment, it is a serious problem.

Government Orders

Another example is with respect to the CFIA. Not only has the government slashed and gutted the number of inspectors available to ensure that food is processed and transported safely, but it has also continued to change the regulations to allow these companies to regulate themselves.

A lot of the business people I have talked to in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour have been around a while and have heard the government say that it has to get rid of red tape. They are asking why it does not just do it. They are asking why there is all the fanfare. They want to know why we need a piece of legislation to make it law for the government to do what it should do in terms of following good administrative practices. I will talk to the businesses in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour more about this bill and about other things that the government is doing as it affects what they do.

I will finish on this point: the government wants to do things to ease the burden on business, but what about easing the business on Canadians in such areas as CRA tax forms, for example? I just saw a report on how academics who have looked at these forms have found them unintelligible. People cannot read them, let alone fill them out properly. We know what happens if people do not fill them out properly—any possible refund they may be eligible to receive is delayed, or they may end up paying interest. If the government is going to deal with issues of taking the administrative burden off Canadians, why does it not look at some of those obvious examples first, and then just get on with business?

As my colleagues have said, we certainly support this initiative. We have some concerns about how this bill is laid out and we will take the opportunity at committee to raise those points, bring in some amendments, and make sure that if the bill does pass, it will be in the best form it possibly can be as a result of our contribution.

ROYAL ASSENT

• (1700)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to questions and comments, I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall

Ottawa

November 6, 2014

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that Stephen Wallace, Secretary to the Governor General, in his capacity as Deputy of the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 6th day of November, 2014, at 4:30 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Jaton

Deputy Secretary

The schedule indicates the bill assented to was Bill C-6, An Act to implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

RED TAPE REDUCTION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to control the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for his speech. I enjoy his company when we are at committee, which he has been visiting lately. I also love the fact that he says his party will support the bill and send it to committee. I am, of course, profoundly disappointed that we have yet to reconstitute committees into this session of Parliament, but I guess that is parliamentary red tape.

As a small business person and a member of many business organizations, it is not hard for most small and medium-sized business owners in this country to realize that one minute spent having to fill out government forms or perform red tape functions in their businesses is a minute they are not on the front line serving customers or growing their businesses. As much as the member said he did not hear from businesses in his riding talking so much about reducing red tape, I find that almost impossible as a small business owner.

Although the member came up with some other suggestions as to where else red tape could be cut, would all small business people not rather be serving customers than filling out forms?

• (1705)

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me respond this way. I enjoy attending the committee that the member chairs. He does a fine job. I have had the opportunity to attend other committee hearings that have been meeting over the past couple of weeks. Unfortunately, none of them were mine. The chair of the fisheries and oceans committee decided for some reason not to call a meeting and that is too bad, because there is important business. I commend him for having called his committee members together and for holding important meetings.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. This issue of the meetings of committees has been ruled repeatedly over this last five days as irrelevant to any of the matters that have been before the House. That certainly includes the bill that is before us. I would admonish all members to both ask questions and give answers that are related to the bill before the House, not extraneous, irrelevant matters.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I feel duly admonished and look forward to my committee meeting.

The businesses in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour are responsible. They want to make sure that the way they are governed by regulation is done in a responsible manner. They are also concerned about issues such as food safety and health and safety, and even though it may slow things down a little here and there, they want to make sure that workers in their workplaces are safe and that the regulations will help that happen. If there is a tragedy or accident, that will surely not only slow down business but increase worker compensation rates.

Those are the kinds of things that people have to consider when they are looking at regulations. It is not a zero-sum game for just one side. All of the elements that go into whether a regulation is in the business interest or the public interest have to be considered.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, the NDP would like to request that the division be deferred until Monday, November 17, 2014, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

Private Members' Business

● (1710)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask you to seek the unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 5:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CHILD POVERTY

(Motion No. 534. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

September 22, 2014—Motion No. 534, Child Poverty— Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River is not present in the House to move the order as announced in today's notice paper. Therefore, the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:11 p.m.)

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