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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a deeply emotional moment for me as I rise for the first time as a member of the House of Commons.

I owe this privilege to the people of the riding of Saint-Jean, home of the international balloon festival. Our largest city, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, will be celebrating its 350th anniversary in 2016. I thank my constituents from the bottom of my heart for this opportunity to serve them once again after my time as mayor and MNA. I can assure them that I will spare no effort in my quest to be worthy of their latest vote of confidence.

I will work hard to deliver on my two main commitments to the region: addressing the armed forces' request to create an undergraduate social science program at the military college in Saint-Jean and completing—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

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[*English*]

PORTAGE—LISGAR

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to rise today to thank the people of Portage—Lisgar for electing me to a third term as their member of Parliament.

What an amazing honour to serve in this esteemed chamber and to represent the values of hard work, strong families, faith, and generosity that so many people in southern Manitoba espouse.

This was a long, hard-fought election, and I want to pay special tribute to my children, Lukas, Delaney, and Parker, who have sacrificed so much time with their mom but whom I know are very proud of me. I love them so much.

I also want to thank the volunteers who helped me. A special mention this time goes to my dearest friend, Debbie Angers, another Morden girl who worked alongside of me the entire election.

I will strive to continue to make the people of Portage—Lisgar proud of me. I will work hard each and every day for their interest and for their good. This is my commitment, and it remains my pleasure.

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● (1405)

NEW BRUNSWICK SOUTHWEST

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today for the first time as the representative of New Brunswick Southwest. I want to thank the constituents of New Brunswick Southwest for voting for real change and for placing their confidence in me.

Our riding is vast and diverse. It stretches from the beautiful Fundy coastal islands to the farmlands of Kings County and the growing communities neighbouring Saint John and Fredericton.

The people of this riding are proud, entrepreneurial, and hopeful. New Brunswick Southwest is rich with natural resources. Our five border crossings with the state of Maine, the international port at Bayside, and world-renowned scientific research will further grow our fisheries, agricultural, and natural resource exports.

As part of the government, I look forward to bringing my experience as an international trade professional to the table to create an environment where New Brunswick Southwest businesses, communities and families will thrive.

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[*Translation*]

JONQUIÈRE

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the holiday season approaches, for my first member's statement, I would like to take a moment to talk about the values that unite us and define who we are in my riding, Jonquière.

Statements by Members

Over the past few weeks, hundreds of people have gone out into the streets to raise money to help our fellow citizens in need.

Our media fundraising drive raised a record amount for Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean: \$223,000. I want to congratulate all the volunteers and thank everyone who donated.

This is an excellent example of the essence of the values, such as sharing, generosity, and dignity, that make the people of Jonquière and the North Shore such a tight-knit community.

It is clear to me that as a community, our unity makes us stronger.

I am so proud that the good people of my riding have trusted me to represent them, and I would once again like to recognize the enormous contributions made by our volunteers in the community. In that spirit, I want to wish everyone a happy holiday season and a 2016 full of hope, optimism and mutual support.

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SHEFFORD

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak in the House for the first time.

I want to thank the people of Shefford for giving me their trust. I will devotedly represent them here in the House.

The city of Granby is one of 13 municipalities in Quebec that will soon be welcoming Syrian refugees. The organization Solidarité ethnique régionale de la Yamaska does excellent work. Since 1992, it has been working to welcome and integrate immigrants and has been helping them get involved in the community. With the assistance of this organization we are ready to welcome the refugees.

I am proud to acknowledge the public's goodwill and generosity. Our constituents are offering a helping hand, and it is really quite remarkable. This community spirit confirms the multicultural values in Granby, which is already home to 118 different cultural communities.

The public's enthusiasm has been documented in a touching report that aired on Radio-Canada. I encourage hon. members to watch that report.

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[English]

COMMUNITIES FOR VETERANS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to talk about an amazing organization in my riding. Communities for Veterans has a mission to bring our communities together by connecting our veterans with our communities.

The face of our veterans has changed, and the challenges they face on their return home are complex. We are only now just beginning to understand the real meaning of the term “post-traumatic stress disorder”.

Setting out on horseback last April from Quesnel, British Columbia, Paul and Terry Nichols made it their goal to change the face of Canada's veterans. Joined by over 250 veterans and others across Canada, their mission was focused on those in our

communities. However, along the way the journey also transformed Paul and Terry's lives. They have seen first hand how equine therapy is helping our veterans and others suffering from PTSD.

It is constituents like Paul and Terry who make me so proud to serve the riding of Cariboo—Prince George. I thank Paul and Terry for taking these bold steps forward.

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● (1410)

RICK HANSEN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I rise for the first time in this noble House, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Mississauga Centre for putting their trust in me, and to renew my commitment to serving all of them with pride.

Today, I am honoured to rise in the House to recognize Mississauga Centre's Rick Hansen Secondary School for its fundraising initiative, called Hansen's Home for Syria. The students and staff at Rick Hansen are raising funds to sponsor and provide settlement assistance to a Syrian refugee family. In collaboration with Lifeline Syria, they will be offering a family shelter and an opportunity for a better life.

The Rick Hansen community is demonstrating to us the true nature of its generosity and compassion. It is heartwarming, inspiring, and quintessentially Canadian.

I call on my colleagues to join me in congratulating Rick Hansen for setting a wonderful example for all Canadians, and offering our full support for its humanitarian project. Well done, Rick Hansen.

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MISSION—MATSQUI—FRASER CANYON

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and a privilege to rise in the House for the first time to express my gratitude to my constituents in the riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon for putting their trust in me to represent them as their member of Parliament in Ottawa. I have the distinct pleasure of representing several diverse communities, and I look forward to working together to champion the needs of my constituents.

As a member of Canada's new government, I am committed to working with indigenous people to ensure that they will play an important role in shaping the future in my riding. I strongly support the initiative our government has shown to take immediate action on an inquiry into the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. This is the first step to bringing in fairness and justice to affected families and communities.

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SELKIRK—INTERLAKE—EASTMAN

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we kick off the 42nd Parliament, I want to thank the great people of Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for putting their trust in me.

Statements by Members

As members know, I was privileged to represent the people of Selkirk—Interlake for the past 11 years. However, in this election, the boundaries changed for our riding. I will now also represent the Eastman region of Manitoba. It is an honour to represent these wonderful constituents, and I am looking forward to serving their beautiful communities along the Winnipeg River system.

I am also thankful for the love and support of my family. My wife and daughters have stood by me for the past 11 years and through 5 elections. I love Kelly, Cortney, Taylor, and Cassidy more than love.

I would also like to thank my incredible campaign team and volunteers who worked so hard. This past weekend, we thanked our supporters with an appreciation Conservative Christmas party. Christmas is a special time of year when we gather as family and friends to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

I offer everyone my best wishes for peace and goodwill this holiday season. Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, and all the best in the new year.

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RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Don Cudmore for his outstanding contribution to the tourism industry of Prince Edward Island.

Executive director of the Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island since 1996, he has provided leadership to an active membership, with roles in lobbying, education, and awareness. Through TIAPEI, he has been instrumental in improving educational opportunities for tourism operators and employees, and nationally raising awareness of the industry with the public.

In 2010, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada recognized Don's dedication in making tourism an important part of his life's work by inducting him into the Tourism Hall of Fame. Last week, he was honoured with the 2015 Canadian Tourism Lifetime Achievement Award.

Residing in Cornwall, P.E.I., with his wife, Diana, he has two grown children, Dana and Jolene.

We wish him all the best in his retirement.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians right across Canada have been mobilizing, organizing, and raising funds to sponsor and welcome Syrian families to our fair land. The youth of our country have, not surprisingly, also stepped up to do their part.

Millennium Kids, a movement of youth across Canada working to do their part to achieve the UN sustainable development goals, have launched a welcome card project.

The welcome card project invites children and youth across Canada to create handmade welcome cards to greet the thousands of expected Syrian newcomer refugees in the coming days, weeks, and months. Twenty-six Canadian schools from Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and P.E.I. are participating in this project.

Today, I am pleased to let members know that we have 40 grade-school children from 14 schools across Toronto, many from my riding of Davenport, to present 1,700 cards to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Many of the youth here are attending schools that are sponsoring refugee families. I would like to welcome them to the House of Commons and to applaud them for their leadership and amazing work.

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● (1415)

ONTARIO ENERGY POLICY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as it is my first time rising in the House, I want to thank the residents of Barrie—Innisfil.

The failed energy policies of Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Liberals continue to overwhelm consumers and seniors, and devastate business in my home province.

The 2015 Ontario Auditor General's report is a laundry list of mismanagement. The report details how incompetence has unnecessarily cost rate payers billions of dollars, how the cost of failing transmission and distribution systems keeps increasing, and how Ontario's residential and small business consumers have had to absorb a whopping 80% increase in their electricity bills.

There has been a lack of an energy plan for the citizens of Ontario. The federal government and the Prime Minister also lack a clear energy plan for Canadians.

The Conservative Party has always ensured that the costs to taxpayers were kept low, and Ontario is a stark reminder of how easily things can get out of hand when a Liberal government drops the ball.

We will continue to hold the Liberals accountable so that what happened—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint John—Rothesay.

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SAINT JOHN

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons to be proud of my riding, Saint John—Rothesay. It is a riding of great success, but also a riding of many in need. Chronic generational poverty is a drain on the lifeblood of our city, with 31% of our children living in poverty. That is number one in the country.

I respectfully ask the Prime Minister and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and all of my colleagues to choose our city as the model for the Canadian poverty reduction strategy.

Why Saint John? It is because we are the most vulnerable population in the country in terms of children living in poverty. Our city size and demographics make Saint John an excellent test case for a national strategy.

Oral Questions

We are ready. We have the co-operation of all levels of government and a strong network of community and business organizations, all committed to ending poverty, especially child poverty in Saint John.

For these reasons, I ask members to choose Saint John as the model city for the Canadian poverty reduction strategy.

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[Translation]

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the people of Abitibi—Témiscamingue for re-electing me.

Recently, each of the candidates to Speaker of the House pointed out the importance of ensuring better work-life balance. As a new mother of a three-month-old, I certainly commend the desire to do better in that regard.

However, today I would like to propose that we aim higher. Over the next four years, I would like us to show leadership when it comes to work-life balance. I would like us to set an example for all legislatures as well as for Canadian businesses.

I hope we can make the world a place where women and new parents do not have to choose between their careers and their families. Having a child is stressful enough, even though it brings many joys. It is important for society to make it easier, not harder, to achieve work-life balance. Together, we can do it.

[English]

Together we can change the world.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in this place for the first time to represent the hard-working riding of Peace River—Westlock, and I would like to thank my constituents for the honour they have bestowed upon me to represent them in Ottawa.

Peace River—Westlock is built on the foundation of farming. Over the course of the last 150 years, farmers have worked hard in my riding to feed Canadians every day. Yet, neither farming nor agriculture was mentioned even once in the Liberal government's throne speech.

There are over 200,000 farmers across Canada who work to provide us with vegetables, grains, dairy, and meats to consumers locally and around the world. They need a government that will stand up for them, value them, and invest in their future.

I can tell members that my Conservative colleagues and I will stand up for rural Canada and the agriculture industry.

• (1420)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time standing in the House and I would like to thank the people of London West for allowing me to represent them in this noble place.

I would like to congratulate the London Abused Women's Centre for another successful Shine the Light on Women Abuse Campaign for the month of November. The goal of the campaign is to raise awareness of violence against women.

Local businesses, schools and homes were encouraged to decorate with the colour purple in the month of November, purple being a symbol of courage, survival, and honour.

The London Abused Women's Centre is a beacon of hope for many women who are struggling to find their way after being abused, most often by their male partners.

I encourage my fellow parliamentarians to shine the light on women abuse in their own municipalities next November. The London Abused Women's Centre would be happy to provide other communities with information on how to shine the light.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election, the Liberal Party made a vague promise to change our election system. Changing the way that Canadians vote is a fundamental change to our democracy.

Will the Prime Minister hold a referendum and give all Canadians a say?

[English]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past 10 years we have heard from many Canadians. They are frustrated with how the electoral system disengages, rewards cynicism, rewards distance, which is why we have committed to engage with Canadians in strong consultations, to talk about the kind of electoral system we need in this country to better reflect the concerns and priorities of Canadians. We will engage, as promised, in broad consultation with Canadians.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we change the rules of democracy everyone gets a say.

Sixty per cent of Canadians did not vote for the Liberal Party. These millions and millions of Canadians who, as the Prime Minister said, he left in the dust get to have a say too.

Does the Prime Minister only listen to Canadians who voted for Liberals, or will he govern for all Canadians and hold a referendum?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to see that the member opposite has suddenly discovered that consulting Canadians is appropriate, because she certainly did not do that during the so-called Fair Elections Act.

We have committed to engage substantively with Canadians, but we have also been very clear that we will implement what we promised to do during the election campaign. Canadians made themselves heard very clearly. They want to be part of a change in government. That is what we are going to bring forward.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should be very careful in assuming that his election victory gives him a mandate and entitles him to make a change in the election system and our democracy. When the Prime Minister actually has a clear proposal for a new voting system, will he take it to the people and hold a referendum?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were very clear that they were tired of the approach over many years of the former government: refusing to listen, refusing to engage, disrespecting democracy, and disrespecting the voice of Canadians. That is exactly what we are going to do, to engage with Canadians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. It is hard to hear the answers. I know all members want to hear the questions and the answers, and I know we are all anxious to show respect for each other and show Canadians we want a good atmosphere in this place. I know it is Wednesday.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's history shows that when a government wants to change the building blocks of our country, it consults Canadians. A significant majority of the population must agree to the changes, and the Liberals have shown in the past that they agree with that way of doing things.

However, now the government wants to change things based on just a few words in an election platform, when less than 27% of Canadians voted for that government.

Will the Prime Minister hold a referendum to ask Canadians what they think?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we think it is very important to consult Canadians and let their voices guide our actions. That is what we are going to do. That is what led to the patriation of the Constitution without a referendum in 1982, for example.

We have the capacity to consult and do the right things in the right way. We are going to continue to consult Canadians, and we will present an electoral system that works for all Canadians.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will stick to the topic at hand. We will get back to Canada's history in due course.

I am not surprised by the Prime Minister's comments today, since last June an article said that Liberal strategists had already decided, behind closed doors, that there would be no referendum to review the electoral system.

Can the Prime Minister confirm today that he plans to make this important decision about our country's future on his own, with unelected advisors who are not accountable to the public, instead of holding a referendum to consult all Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear and we continue to be clear about the fact that we will consult all Canadians, starting with the elected members of the House of Commons, to create a system of electoral reform that works for the whole country. We will do this right, based on what Canadians have to say, not what the Conservatives have to say.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party's tax cut is leaving out millions of Canadians. The Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, who earns \$184,000 a year, will get the maximum tax cut. A single senior earning \$30,000 a year will not get one cent. The NDP put forward a proposal to give the tax break to the first level of income earners in Canada. That would have helped millions of more Canadians.

Why did the Prime Minister vote against helping the most needy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is proud of the throne speech that the Governor General read last week, and that is why we are supporting that throne speech. We encourage all members in the House to do that because it is a reflection of what Canadians asked for right across the country: investments in our future and in our communities, and help for the middle class by lowering taxes on the middle class and raising them for the wealthiest 1%. It is what Canadians have asked us collectively to do, and it is what we are going to do.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows full well that his so-called middle-class tax cut is actually excluding 70% of Canadians. That is not a middle-class tax cut. It gives the maximum benefit to an executive earning \$190,000 a year, though.

The real question is, why are the most needy in Canada left off his Christmas list? Why do they get a lump of coal when he gives the maximum benefit to CEOs?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are raising taxes on the wealthiest 1% so that we can lower them for the middle class. It was in our platform. It was what we put forward.

The member opposite did not choose to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% in his electoral platform. He did not choose to lower taxes on the middle class in his electoral platform. We made that commitment, and that is exactly what we are doing.

*Oral Questions***CANADA POST**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Actually, what the Liberals are doing, Mr. Speaker, is giving a tax break to people who earn \$200,000 a year and leaving out a family with two kids earning \$45,000. They are the middle class. They are the ones who should have help. The rest is a chimera.

[*Translation*]

I have a quote to read to the Prime Minister about Canada Post. He promised to, and I quote, “save home mail delivery”.

Yesterday he told us to visit his website. His website was not elected. He was.

Will he restore home mail delivery, yes or no?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect to receive quality service at a reasonable cost. We committed to stop installing the mailboxes that the former Conservative government started installing, and we also committed to working with Canadians, Canada Post and other organizations and groups to ensure that Canadians get the postal service they deserve.

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TAXATION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he made a solemn commitment to restore the service. Now he is going back on his word.

Let us look at another promise he made. Once again, I am quoting the leader of the Liberal Party. In a speech to the Montreal chamber of commerce, he promised to immediately reinstate the Fonds de solidarité tax credit in full.

We have just learned that instead of fully reinstating it by January 1, he plans to reduce it.

Why is he once again going back on his word?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the opposition members are frustrated because there were not enough details in our throne speech. The fact is that not only is there the throne speech, but we also made public every one of the mandate letters we issued to our ministers to clearly set out our priorities. Reinstating the tax credit for labour-sponsored funds was part of the mandate letter issued to our Minister of Finance.

* * *

[*English*]

FINANCE

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance knows that the Liberals made a commitment for a \$10-billion deficit cap, and we and finance officials also know that the deficit is going to be higher. That is a broken promise.

The Minister of Finance has not answered my question in the House to date—although I have hopes for the rest of the week—of how big a deficit he will run.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves in a more challenging situation than we expected. We were left with a deficit that we now need to deal with. Our plan for investing in Canada is now more important than ever. We made a commitment to invest in infrastructure. We made a commitment to reduce our net debt-to-GDP over time. We are going to do this in a fiscally responsible, prudent, and transparent way for Canadians to understand our plan.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know that all members are interested in hearing the answers, including the member for Peace River—Mackenzie, I believe it is. I am sure he wants to hear, so we are all going to listen carefully.

The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would like to get some answers as well, but they are not coming.

Another promise that was made, of course, was that the Liberal tax plan would be revenue neutral. We now know it is not revenue neutral; there is a \$1.2 billion shortfall. However, lo and behold, the Minister of Finance is going to fill that gap by taxing small businesses, the veterinarians, the chiropractors, the doctors, the dentists, and seniors, through the TFSA.

My question is this. What other taxes will he continue to raise as he goes down this long road of long-term structural deficits?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our plan is focused on tax measures that would help the broadest cross-section of Canadians to do well. In a challenging economic situation, reducing taxes for the middle class, putting more money in their pockets, is absolutely the right thing to do—now more than ever.

We are on a plan to be prudent and fiscally responsible but to help the broadest cross-section of Canadians with tax measures that will help them.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Morneau Shepell, the Minister of Finance's former firm, a tax-free savings account is a smart way to help seniors ensure that they have a stable retirement income.

Now the Minister of Finance wants to reduce the TFSA limit. He is rejecting the advice of his own experts and penalizing seniors.

How can the minister penalize seniors and not take his own firm's advice?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are focused on helping the broadest cross-section of Canadians. The Canadians who used and were eligible for the maximum of the TFSA were 6.7%. That means that 93.3% were unable to use the maximum. We will move forward with our tax cut for the middle which would help a broad cross-section of Canadians, and introduce a Canada child benefit that would help nine out of ten families to do better.

* * *

● (1435)

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign, the Prime Minister said that a significant percentage of small businesses were nothing but tax shelters for Canadians seeking to avoid paying tax.

I disagree. Canadian small businesses and entrepreneurs create wealth, and we should honour and support them rather than penalize them with tax hikes.

Will the Minister of Small Business and Tourism follow her leader's orders and penalize Canadian entrepreneurs and small businesses, or will she deliver on her mandate to protect small businesses?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question.

[English]

We have a growth agenda. As we pursue our initiatives, we will, with each and every one of them, look at how they grow the economy. We will be focused on trying to help businesses, large and small, to pursue the opportunity for growth across our economy. Our investments will make an enormous difference in productivity, and they will help all businesses to succeed.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised Canadians a revenue-neutral tax cut, made possible by taxing high earners. However, just three days into this Parliament, the Minister of Finance admitted that they have the math completely wrong: a promise made, a promise broken.

Will the Minister of Finance make up for his \$1.2 billion shortfall by raising taxes, or does he plan to tack another \$1.2 billion onto the structural deficit that he is building?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves with an economic situation that was not what we expected when we came into power. In facing up to challenging economic times, we want to do the right thing. We are going to start by reducing taxes. This is an especially good week for those Canadians who realize that they are going to get a tax advantage with our reduction in taxes for the middle class.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a pretty straightforward question, and I believe the finance

minister owes Canadians a straightforward answer. The Liberals came to this Parliament with just two policies to implement before Christmas: the refugee plan and their tax plan. In both cases, they completely miscalculated the cost to taxpayers. Having already dug themselves into a hole, the Liberals are now refusing to acknowledge their promise to hold the deficit to \$10 billion. How high are they prepared to go?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we found ourselves in a hole, a hole not of our making. We are now setting out to help Canadians to engineer growth. We are going to make investments in our economy that will make a difference. We are going to reduce taxes for the middle class, and we are going to help those struggling to do well by introducing benefits that will help them as well, in our budget 2016.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberals promised to restore a rigorous environmental assessment process that would take into account the impact of greenhouse gases. They also promised to reform the National Energy Board. They definitively rejected the Conservatives' thoroughly devitalized process.

However, on Monday, the Prime Minister refused to provide a clear indication of when the process would be reviewed or whether projects already under way would be subject to the new process.

Can the government tell us whether projects currently under way will finally have to go through a meaningful environmental assessment process?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for those projects that are currently under review, the proponents will not be asked to go back to square one. There will be a transition period that will embody the principles that were in the campaign platform. In the Prime Minister's mandate to me and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, it will be transparent and it will involve consultation with indigenous communities.

● (1440)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what they said during the campaign. We know the environmental assessment process that was gutted by the Conservatives is in desperate need of a revamp, but in the meantime, we see these pipeline projects like Kinder Morgan moving forward under a weakened system. During the election, the new Liberal member for Burnaby North—Seymour told the *Burnaby Now*, and I quote: "Kinder Morgan will have to go through a new revised process" before it's approved.

My question is very simple: Why did they tell British Columbians something different from what they are telling them today?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to modernize the National Energy Board, and what that means is that it will be reflective of regional difference, representing the entire country. It will embody into its work respect for indigenous communities and indigenous culture. We have to restore public confidence in the regulatory process so we can move our resources to market responsibly and sustainably.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government says one thing and does another. For the last year, the Prime Minister said he did not need taxpayer child care. As a mother of five, I am offended, for his first act in cabinet was to give himself child care benefits that no other Canadians have. Why did the Prime Minister not keep his word, and is it because he is entitled to his entitlements?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will not surprise people to know that we have different family requirements than the previous occupants of the Prime Minister's Office. We will maintain the existing budget at the same level and reformulate it as necessary for the needs of my young family.

* * *

[Translation]

THE SENATE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is another example of the Prime Minister saying one thing and doing another.

As hon. members know, the Prime Minister sure does like to talk about transparency. However, he appointed the new Speaker of the Senate without consulting anyone. He appointed a Speaker who cannot even speak both official languages.

Was it more important to appoint a close friend of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons than to appoint a bilingual Speaker to the Senate?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we appointed a senator of great integrity to preside over the Senate. He is the first Speaker of the Senate from Newfoundland and Labrador.

The current Speaker has served the Senate honourably and blew the whistle on the abuses in the Senate a few years ago. We are proud of his appointment.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the week, the Prime Minister has enjoyed talking about his election platform, so let us talk about it. On page 31 it says, "The status quo is not an option: the Senate needs to change."

The Liberals announced that a committee of five people appointed by the Prime Minister would make recommendations to him on who to appoint to the Senate in future.

Will the Liberals make real change to the Senate and put an end to the status quo?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the first time, we are offering the provinces and territories an open door to be part of this non-partisan, merit-based appointment process.

For the first time, we have published the criteria upon which the advisory board will be assessing the merits of these new senators, and we are confident that this process will restore the confidence of Canadians in this vital institution of our democratic process.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 2, the Minister of Finance sent out a fundraising email in his official capacity.

This is a clear violation of the guide of conduct for ministers, which states:

Ministers...should ensure that fundraising communications issued on their behalf do not suggest any connection between fundraising and official government business.

This is yet another example of the government saying one thing but doing another. How is the Prime Minister planning to hold his finance minister accountable for this ethical breach?

• (1445)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we intend on consulting Canadians in all of our activities over the course of our mandate.

In this particular case, we decided that this particular consultation was one that we did not want to pursue, so we cancelled it.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the campaign trail, the Liberal government promised to immediately boost the guaranteed income supplement by 10% to help low-income seniors struggling on fixed incomes to make ends meet.

However, since being elected, there has been no sign of a timeline, and with mounting examples of backtracking on other promises, seniors are getting worried and wondering if the government understands that immediate needs require immediate attention.

When will the government implement its promise to lift seniors out of poverty?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is my first opportunity to speak in this honourable House of Commons. I want to thank the people of Quebec for electing me and giving me the opportunity to join this assembly in contributing to the serious work that awaits us.

I want to respond to my hon. colleague's excellent question. I thank him for asking the question, and I would say to him that we will address this matter responsibly and as soon as possible.

Oral Questions

[English]

STEEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with U.S. Steel Canada filing for bankruptcy protection, the pensions and health benefits of 20,000 workers and pensioners are in jeopardy.

The previous government rubber-stamped the takeover, then signed a secret deal to let the company off the hook for broken promises.

During the election campaign, the new government promised it would release the details and hold the company accountable for all the promises to workers and pensioners.

When will the government live up to its rhetoric, open up the secret deal, and stand up for workers' pensions?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, the content is confidential. We cannot unilaterally disclose it. However, I would welcome and support a decision by U.S. Steel to disclose the terms of the settlement in the spirit of openness and transparency, like the example set by our Prime Minister.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members from Hamilton on this side of the House who have raised the issue with me as well.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians from across the country have joined together to help Syrian refugees come to Canada and begin a new life. This is something that we can all be proud of. I know that, in my riding of York South—Weston, we look forward to welcoming these new Canadian residents.

As someone who represents a riding with many Canadians who were once refugees, I ask if the Prime Minister could please update this august House on this important national level.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for York South—Weston and congratulate him on his election to this House.

Resettling refugees demonstrates our commitment to Canadians and to the world, that Canada understands that we can and must do more. I am pleased to announce to this House that the first plane carrying Syrian refugees will be arriving in Toronto tomorrow evening at 9:15 p.m., and the second plane will arrive in Montreal on Saturday.

[Translation]

It will be a great—

The Speaker: The member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not just the finance minister who is using his position inappropriately. Now we know that at least four other ministers are using their positions to fundraise for the Liberal Party. Airfare, hotel rooms, and access to ministers are being offered at an event this evening in return for generous donations to the Liberal Party. Will the Prime Minister put an immediate stop to this practice of selling access to his ministers?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the event the member referred to is the Liberal caucus Christmas party this evening. I know many people from across the country are looking forward to that event. We are certainly hoping that you will be able to attend, Mr. Speaker, as I understand you have with other caucus Christmas parties as well.

The important thing to note is that, in fact, to enter the particular contest the member referred to does not require a donation. We are hopeful that many people will look forward to a very good evening tonight.

• (1450)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot just excuse this kind of improper behaviour. Now the Liberals are selling access to Christmas, so it would seem. The rules are actually very clear: ministers are not allowed to use their positions for partisan purposes. However, the environment minister has also used her position to recruit support for the Liberal Party.

The current government left Canadians with the impression that it would do things differently. Can the environment minister assure Canadians that this will never happen again? Do we need to be the government's conscience all the time?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to doing things differently. That is exactly what this government is doing. We are doing things in a more open and transparent way. We are following all of the required rules with respect to fundraising. People should understand that these events are normal events where Canadians have a chance to interact with all kinds of people who share public policy views, and we are proud to be interacting with Canadians at so many events across the country.

The Speaker: Does the member for Peace River—Mackenzie have a problem?

I am glad he does not.

What is the riding? We will get it right.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there is more. On November 11, the Minister of Veterans Affairs sent an email bearing his title and promoting the Liberal Party. Not only was it inappropriate to use Remembrance Day for partisan purposes, but it was also clearly a violation of the Prime Minister's rules for cabinet.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister agree that it is inappropriate for his Minister of Veterans Affairs to use Remembrance Day to promote the Liberal Party?

[*English*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the work done by our Minister of Veterans Affairs. He is serving Canadians in an exemplary way.

I find it a little rich that someone from across the aisle would be talking about using government resources for partisan purposes. One of the reasons why we are on this side of the aisle is that people got tired of that continued abuse of government resources.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem goes well beyond that and comes from the top.

The Prime Minister is promoting a lottery, the Liberal lottery. People buy a ticket in the hope of winning an opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister or members of his cabinet in private. That is completely unacceptable and unethical.

[*English*]

How can someone accept that situation? It is unethical. It is inappropriate.

Could the Prime Minister assure Canadians that he will reimburse the lottery money?

[*Translation*]

Can the Prime Minister reassure Canadians that he will reimburse the money obtained inappropriately?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party continues to hold open events across the country. This evening, we will hold our Christmas party, which will be attended by 2,500 people coming from all over Canada. The reality is that people do not have to pay any money to win the contest or attend the party. Therefore, there is nothing to reimburse. Inviting people to celebrate the holidays shows openness. My colleague is welcome to attend.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie for listening that time.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Transport Canada is investigating allegations that 57 rail cars were left parked on a mountain slope outside Revelstoke, B.C., without proper handbrakes. After what we have learned from the Lac-Mégantic disaster, it is unbelievable that another train loaded with dangerous cargo may have been left unattended and another community put at risk.

The Transportation Safety Board is reporting increased incidents of derailments, runaway trains, and violations of rail safety rules.

Will this government get serious and enforce safety rules to prevent more rail disasters?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we in this government care deeply about rail safety, especially after the tragic events at Lac-Mégantic.

I can assure the member that we are looking into this at the moment. Transport Canada officials are specifically looking at this case. We will report back when we have the final verdict.

• (1455)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the House's unanimous support for a motion that I moved during the last session, the matter of non-designated airports in Canada has still not been resolved. Let us talk about it at the Sherbrooke airport.

Given the promises his party and its members have made, can the Minister of Transport give us an update on the development of the much-touted mechanism that non-designated airports have long been waiting for and that would finally allow them to reach agreements with airlines?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

There are 89 designated airports in Canada, where security is provided by Transport Canada. The previous government implemented a mechanism whereby other non-designated airports can have access to the same security system on a cost-recovery basis. I know that the Sherbrooke airport is one of the six airports that applied.

* * *

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of jobs are being lost in the energy sector because of low oil prices, because of over-regulation, and because of carbon taxes, and now there is more uncertainty from the Liberal government when it comes to pipelines.

When the Prime Minister is in one part of the country, he supports energy east. When he is in another part, he does not.

For the sake of good jobs, would the Prime Minister tell Canadians today if he supports the energy east pipeline?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should review the success of those on the other side of the House in getting pipelines built.

I have already been in Alberta, and I have seen the results of this very low spot in the commodity cycle. While the prices are low, we will be modernizing the National Energy Board, so when pipelines are built, they will have the confidence of Canadians.

Oral Questions

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is all over the map when it comes to the energy sector. Sadly, it is not the western Canada map. Everything the government says contradicts its claims to be committed to a science-based policy and fair processes.

In October, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board stated, “pipelines are not going to be necessary”, because of their policies.

Which member of the government will stand up and explain to Canadians why it is opposed to resource development, the lifeblood of the economies of rural Canada and the economy of Canada?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 20% of GNP of Canada rests in the natural resource sector. We are serious about moving those resources in a responsible way to export markets, and we will do it in a way that will have the public confidence of Canadians.

We will do it by consulting indigenous communities as well.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, oil prices continue to decline and jobs in my province in the Canadian energy sector are being lost, yet the Liberal government is abandoning the global consensus on temperature targets. Instead, it is supporting a radical environmental policy that would kill even more jobs.

Even the Alberta NDP had to pause briefly in its attack on farmers to comment that this decision is extreme and will displace emissions and chase good Canadian jobs to other parts of the world.

Why will the government not listen to Canadians in its mission to destroy our energy industry and the jobs that go with it?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, commodity prices are at a historic low. We will take advantage of this moment to look at the regulatory process.

We will ensure that our resources get to international markets sustainably. We care as much about those who are suffering from where we are in the cycle as anybody else in this chamber.

* * *

POVERTY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has just been revealed that my riding of Sydney—Victoria has the highest child poverty rate in Canada at 35%, and under the age of six, it is 43%.

This is not acceptable when our children are living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. What will the government do to help these kids in Cape Breton and other kids in poverty around the country?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, poverty and inequality are not just problems for individual Canadians; all of Canada is affected.

I have seen it, like the hon. member, as I have gone door to door. That is why we have a plan to lift hundreds of thousands of Canadian children out of poverty.

• (1500)

[*Translation*]

The Canadian child benefit will help nine out of 10 families. Our investments in affordable housing and social infrastructure will help fight poverty in Sydney—Victoria, Toronto Centre, and across Canada.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister recently announced that he would add \$2.65 billion to the ever-increasing deficit to go toward international climate change funding in developing countries, yet there was not a single mention of this spending promise during the campaign.

Could the Minister of International Development confirm if this commitment is in addition to the \$1.2 billion that our Conservative government had committed? Where will this money come from and will it come at the expense of those most vulnerable in developing countries?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Climate change is a global challenge that affects every person and every country, particularly the poorest countries and developing countries.

Canada has committed to spend \$2.65 billion over the next five years to help the countries that are most affected, most of which are developing countries.

Official development assistance must meet very specific criteria. The action plan has not been fully implemented yet. I can therefore come back to this question and provide my colleague with an answer a little later when the plan has been implemented.

* * *

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Minister of Canadian Heritage on her appointment, and I want to assure her that she will have my full co-operation in protecting our heritage.

This week we learned that the board of directors of CBC/Radio-Canada, whose members were appointed by the Conservatives, is continuing to make controversial decisions about the corporation's future and is now looking to move out of the Maison de Radio-Canada and into rented facilities. This plan goes against the public's wishes, shows a lack of transparency and jeopardizes CBC/Radio-Canada's ability to produce programming.

Oral Questions

Can the minister tell us whether she intends to green-light this plan to move out of Maison de Radio-Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question.

As Minister of Canadian Heritage, I have the duty to ensure that CBC/Radio-Canada operates at arm's length from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

That said, pursuant to my mandate letter, I also have the duty to review the process by which members are appointed to the board of directors, and I assure my colleague and all of my colleagues in the House of Commons that if everyone agrees, we will bring in a new process in the coming months.

* * *

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November 25 marked the first day of 16 days of activism against gender violence. During these 16 days, we were reminded that violence continues to be a reality for far too many women and girls in Canada. As a former prosecutor, I have seen first-hand the effects of gender-based violence. Living a life free of violence is a basic human right, one that all Canadian women should expect.

Can the Minister of Status of Women tell us what steps the government is taking to be a part of the solution to ending gender violence?

Hon. Patricia Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my experience has shown me that many different factors go into women's vulnerability to experiencing violence, things like home, socio-economic background, age, vulnerability due to disability.

Violence against women is not acceptable and it should never be tolerated in our society. That is why I am very pleased to announce that in the coming weeks I will be working on creating a federal anti-violence strategy with my provincial and territorial partners across the country. I am really looking forward to getting started on this very important file.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last June, the Prime Minister offered this rationale for opposing a referendum: "electoral reform has had a lot of trouble getting through plebiscites". No kidding. In 2007, only 37% of Ontarians supported MMP. How much better if we had not let that silly referendum prejudice the outcome of Ontario's electoral reform process?

Fast forward to last October and the federal Liberals won only 39% of the vote. How exactly does 39% of the vote in an election constitute a better, clearer mandate for a specific form of electoral reform than 51% in a referendum?

• (1505)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in 10 years, Canadians are being

listened to. Canadians voted for change and they voted for a change in our electoral process. We will be delivering on that commitment. I will be working with the government House leader to convene an all-party parliamentary committee to review the various electoral reform options available to us.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 20, the Prime Minister promised the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal that a Liberal government would immediately reinstate the tax credits for labour-sponsored funds in full. He kept saying that throughout the campaign.

Quebeckers really value these funds as tools that promote economic development and savings. Even though the Minister of Finance has a mandate to restore the tax credits, he is dodging the issue by saying that he wants to hold consultations.

The minister has a mandate to do this. When will he do it?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will keep our promise about tax credits for contributions to labour-sponsored funds.

The government is taking action on the priorities in its plan, including tax measures. Our immediate priority is to give middle-class Canadians a tax break as of January 1, 2016. That is why the government will be introducing legislative measures today to reduce middle-class tax rates.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the soon to be Honourable Dwight Ball, Premier designate of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

MEMBER FOR OTTAWA—VANIER

Mr. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and if you seek it, you should find unanimous consent for the following motion, which I would like to read in both official languages out of respect for members of the House and especially the member for Ottawa—Vanier. I move:

That this House, desiring to record its deep appreciation of the distinguished and faithful service to Parliament and to Canada of the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, appoint this Member honorary Chair occupant, on a day to be designated by the Speaker.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I take it from the reaction of the House that there is unanimous consent.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 38 of the Access to Information Act, to lay upon the table the report of the Information Commissioner for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2015.

● (1510)

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

* * *

PAYMENTS IN LIEU OF TAXES ACT

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-201, An Act to amend the Payments in Lieu of Taxes Act (independent assessment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to spend too much time on this, since we have a vote coming up. However, I made an election commitment to reintroduce this bill at the first opportunity in order to ensure that the City of Chambly gets its fair share of payments in lieu of taxes.

[English]

I would also like to quickly thank the former MP for Halifax, Megan Leslie, who worked so hard on this issue and who seconded my bill in the last Parliament. Thanks to her good work, if we get the bill adopted Halifax will have a lot more money in its coffers and will get its fair share from the federal government as well.

I am looking forward to getting support, as the Liberal candidate in my riding promised in the last election.

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

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL BILL OF RIGHTS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-202, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights and to make a related amendment to another Act.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to again table a Canadian environmental bill of rights. While similar measures have been enacted by the provinces and territories, no such law has been enacted at the federal level.

The bill enacts into domestic law international commitments made decades ago by Canada. First, it enshrines the right of Canadians to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. Second, it enshrines the Government of Canada's public trust duty to protect the environment, including legislating and enforcing environmental protection laws. Third, it extends to Canadians the right to hold their

Routine Proceedings

government accountable through access to environmental information, participation in decisions impacting healthy environment, and standing to seek judicial intervention where those rights are denied. Passage of the bill has become all the more critical to redress the erosion of environmental rights and protections wrought by the previous government.

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

* * *

[Translation]

SUPREME COURT ACT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-203, An Act to amend the Supreme Court Act (understanding the official languages).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to introduce a bill to amend the Supreme Court Act with regard to understanding the official languages. I am doing so in honour of my colleague Yvon Godin, the former member for Acadie—Bathurst, who worked so hard on this important file in order to fight for the right of all Canadians to argue their cases before the Supreme Court in the official language of their choice.

It is time to make it mandatory to appoint bilingual judges to the Supreme Court. Understanding both official languages should be an essential requirement. This is about equality between francophones and anglophones when it comes to access to justice. Since the Supreme Court is the highest court in the country, it is crucial that its judges be able to understand both official languages without the help of an interpreter.

I hope this bill will finally become law in the 42nd Parliament.

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

* * *

● (1515)

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-204, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (gender identity and gender expression).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill that, in fact, was passed twice by the House of Commons: in the 40th Parliament and again in the 41st Parliament, each time only to be blocked by the unelected Senate.

Before we can take up consideration of this bill again, more than five years will have passed since the House first voted to explicitly guarantee transgender and gender-variant Canadians the same rights and protections the rest of us already enjoy. Meanwhile, transgender people continue to suffer from high levels of discrimination and all too often, violence.

Government Orders

I was pleased to hear that the new government was prepared to act quickly on this fundamental rights question. I look forward to working with the Minister of Justice and members from all parties to ensure that either the government's bill or my bill is adopted as soon as possible.

Since I introduced Bill C-279 in 2011, seven provinces have added these same provisions to their human rights codes.

Let us start down the road toward full equality for transgender Canadians by acting quickly to fill this significant gap in our human rights legislation.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE WHOLE

ASSISTANT DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose for the ratification of the House a candidate for the position of Assistant Deputy Speaker and Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mr. Anthony Rota for the position of Assistant Deputy Speaker and Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I am hopeful that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: that, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the Standing Committee on Finance may hold organizational meetings on December 9 and that the membership of the said committee shall be as follows: Wayne Easter, Raj Grewal, Steven MacKinnon, Jennifer O'Connell, Robert-Falcon Ouellette, Francesco Sorbara, Lisa Raitt, Ron Liepert, Phil McColeman, and Guy Caron; and, during its consideration of proceedings pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), the Standing Committee on Finance, together with any necessary staff, may travel within Canada and may authorize the broadcasting of its proceedings; and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 83(1), the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to present its report on the pre-budget consultations no later than February 5, 2016.

● (1520)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time that I am rising in the House, I want to thank the

good people of Burnaby South for re-electing me. I also thank my staff and volunteers, and my wife, Jeanette, for supporting me all the way through the election.

I rise today to present a petition from many people in Burnaby who are opposed to the Kinder Morgan pipeline. I am sure they will be disappointed to hear today that the minister has decided to go ahead with the current NEB review process for that pipeline.

I urge the government to pay careful attention to this petition, which has been signed by people, including those who were arrested at the protest in Burnaby Mountain.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that a ways and means motion to amend the Income Tax Act be concurred in.

The 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 Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1530)

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

(Division No. 2)

YEAS

Members

Aldag

Alghabra

Government Orders

Alleslev	Amos	O'Regan	Ouellette
Anandasangaree	Angus	Paradis	Peschisolido
Arseneault	Arya	Peterson	Petipas Taylor
Ashton	Aubin	Philpott	Picard
Ayoub	Badawey	Plamondon	Poissant
Bagnell	Bains	Quach	Qualtrough
Barsalou-Duval	Baylis	Ramsey	Rankin
Beaulieu	Beech	Ratansi	Rioux
Bélangier	Bennett	Robillard	Rodriguez
Benson	Bibeau	Romanado	Rota
Bittle	Blaikie	Rudd	Ruimy
Blair	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Rusnak	Sahota
Boissonnault	Bossio	Saini	Sajan
Boudrias	Boulerice	Samson	Sangha
Boutin-Sweet	Bratina	Sansoucy	Sarai
Breton	Brison	Scarpaleggia	Schieffe
Brosseau	Caesar-Chavannes	Schulte	Serré
Cannings	Caron	Sgro	Sheehan
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger	Sikand	Simms
Champagne	Chan	Sohi	Sorbara
Chen	Choquette	Spengemann	Ste-Marie
Christopherson	Cormier	Stetski	Stewart
Cuzner	Dabrusin	Tabbara	Tan
Damoff	Davies	Tassi	Thériault
DeCoursey	Dhaliwal	Tootoo	Trudeau
Dhillon	Di Iorio	Trudel	Vandal
Dion	Donnelly	Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Drouin	Dubé	Virani	Weir
Dubourg	Duclos	Whalen	Wilkinson
Duguid	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Wilson-Raybould	Wrzesniewskij
Dusseau	Duvall	Young	Zahid— 230
Dzerowicz	Easter		
Ehsassi	El-Khoury		
Ellis	Erskine-Smith		
Eyking	Eyolfson		
Fergus	Fillmore		
Finnigan	Fisher	Aboultaif	Albas
Fonseca	Footé	Albrecht	Allison
Fortin	Fragiskatos	Ambrose	Andersson
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)	Arnold	Barlow
Freeland	Fry	Bergen	Bernier
Fuhr	Gameau	Berthold	Bezan
Garrison	Gerretsen	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Gill	Goldsmith-Jones	Boucher	Brassard
Goodale	Gould	Brown	Calkins
Graham	Grewal	Carrie	Chong
Hajdu	Hardcastle	Clarke	Clement
Hardie	Harvey	Cooper	Delteil
Hehr	Holland	Diotte	Doherty
Housefather	Hughes	Dreeschen	Egłinski
Hussen	Hutchings	Falk	Fast
Iacono	Johns	Finley	Généreux
Jolibois	Joly	Genius	Gladu
Jones	Jordan	Godin	Gourde
Jowhari	Julian	Harder	Harper
Kang	Khalid	Hillyer	Hoback
Khera	Kwan	Jeneroux	Kelly
Lametti	Lamoureux	Kent	Kitchen
Lapointe	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	Kmiec	Lake
Laverdière	LeBlanc	Lebel	Liepert
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre	Lobb	Lukiwski
Lemieux	Leslie	MacKenzie	Maguire
Levitt	Lightbound	McCaughey (Edmonton West)	McColeman
Long	Longfield	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)	Nater	Nicholson
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Nuttall	Obhrai
Malcolmson	Maloney	O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Marcil	Masse (Windsor West)	Poillievre	Raïtt
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)		Rayes	Reid
Mathysen		Rempel	Richards
May (Cambridge)	McCallum	Ritz	Saroya
McCrimmon	McDonald	Scheer	Schmale
McGuinty	McKay	Shields	Shipley
MacKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Sopuck	Sorenson
Mendès	Medicino	Stanton	Strahl
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)	Stubbs	Sweet
Soeurs)		Tilson	Trost
Monsef	Moore	Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Morneau	Morrissey	Vecchio	Viersen
Mulcair	Murray	Wagantall	Warawa
Nantel	Nassif	Warkentin	Watts
Nault	O'Connell	Waugh	Webber
Oliphant	Oliver	Wong	Yurdiga

NAYS**Members**

Government Orders

Zimmer— 95

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, be read the first time and printed.

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

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all the votes in the Supplementary Estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

[Translation]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

* * *

• (1535)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2015-16

(The House in committee of the whole, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair.)

The Chair: Order, please. I have a brief comment on today's committee proceedings. Today's debate is a general one on all votes tabled before the House on Monday, December 7.

Pursuant to the provisions in the motion adopted on Friday, December 4, 2015, the total length of time for debate will not exceed three hours. The first round will begin with the official opposition followed by the government and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

[Translation]

Within each period, each party may allocate 15 minutes to one or more of its members for speeches or questions and answers. In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allocated may speak one after the other, but the time allocated for speeches must not exceed 10 minutes.

The Chair would appreciate it if the first member to speak in each period would indicate how that time will be used, particularly if the time will be shared.

When the time is to be used for questions and answers, the minister's response should reflect approximately the time taken by the question.

Furthermore, no quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

[English]

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair, as is the case in normal debate in this place. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all

established standards of decorum, parliamentary language, and behaviour.

I would also remind hon. members that in the committee of the whole format, members are permitted to take a seat of their choosing in the chamber. They do not have to be in their assigned seat to be recognized to participate in the debate.

We will now begin this afternoon's session. The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to the provisional Standing Order 81(5), consideration in committee of the whole of all votes in the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

• (1540)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, the bulk of my questions will be related to the component of the estimates dealing with the Syrian refugee initiative.

For monies to be allocated to the government Syrian refugee initiative included in the supplementary estimates (B), could the parliamentary secretary provide a breakdown as to what programs, services, and initiatives these monies will be allocated to?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in the breakdown that has been provided, we have an aggregate amount of total budgetary expenditures of \$280.2 million for the fiscal year 2015-16. That is composed of a portion that includes operating expenditures. We have a salary portion and a non-salary portion, and a grants and contributions portion. For the salary portion there is an amount of \$11.7 million and the non-salary portion is \$166.3 million, giving a total operating expenditure of \$178.0 million. An additional \$99.9 million is for grants and contributions, which is the resettlement assistance program, made up of two components— income support and reception facilities—as well as an amount of \$10 million for settlement programs for service provider organizations.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I would like to know how many full-time equivalents are associated with those cost figures in the salary line.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the number of full-time equivalents is 72. Could the member repeat the second part of the question?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, that is fine.

The Province of Alberta has requested extra funding from the minister of immigration to help cover housing costs. When asked about this request in an interview in Calgary last week, the minister was characterized as being non-committal in stating, "I'm not saying no, but we've already put close to \$700 million on the table."

How much of the \$280 million included in these estimates will be dedicated to helping provincial governments cover the costs of housing Syrian refugees?

Government Orders

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the work with the provinces is an ongoing process. We are thankful for the support we have received around the country for what is truly a national project. We are engaged in active consultations with all of the provinces and territories. We are making a significant federal government investment. However, that is obviously not the only investment in this case.

We have already spent \$1 billion supporting the integration of immigrants across the country. We will be adding \$300 million more in funding to that total as a result of this announcement. We are working with our partners on some ongoing settlement and integration challenges, including the high costs of housing refugees. We recognize that securing housing is difficult. The Government of Canada already provides funding for government-assisted refugees—

The Chair: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I believe that the Standing Order said that we would have equal time.

This is a very pointed question. Do the supplementary estimates include additional money for provinces to cover the costs of housing?

• (1545)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the answer is no.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, in the government's campaign platform, it calculated the cost of the Syrian refugee initiative to be \$250 million. Clearly, that is not attainable. I am wondering what cost assumptions have changed between its campaign platform commitment and its revised target of 10,000 refugees that—

The Chair: Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the campaign commitment was in the order of \$200 million, with a large portion of that being spent on the processing that is taking place overseas.

As the hon. member knows, the campaign commitment includes a large number of refugees. We are very committed to bringing in what is the largest number of refugees represented by the group of Five Eyes nations, for example. We are presenting our policy as an example to the world, including all of the western world, in what we are providing.

To directly answer the member's point, the costing differentiation is a result of the investigations we have undertaken on how to facilitate the processing and to take into account a concern raised many times by the members opposite.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, would my colleague the parliamentary secretary characterize the Liberal platform as not fully costed, given that it did not include the entire commitment for this refugee initiative?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, I did not understand the question. Was the question did we characterize the platform as not fully costed?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, to re-emphasize the point, given that this expenditure exceeds what was put in the Liberal platform, was the platform not fully costed?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the platform has been fully costed at all points in time. Perhaps that is a source of amusement to my friend opposite, but that is the accurate truth.

When we decide to roll out a program, we find that there are expenses that may arise that we may not have anticipated. We have costed—

The Chair: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill on a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I have other questions. That was a very brief question. It was a yes or no question. I only took five seconds and he was going on with platitudes.

My question to my colleague is this. If he is defining a fully costed platform as something that is well over what was budgeted in the platform, perhaps he does not understand what fully costed is. However, I will continue.

The settlement and refugee assistance program, or RAP, assists immigrants and refugees to overcome barriers and better participate in social, cultural, civic, and economic life in Canada. Most of these services are designed and delivered by service-provider organizations. These organizations apply for funds by a call for proposals. Today the minister announced that the new contribution agreements would be put on hold until 2017 due to the government's Syrian refugee initiative.

Yesterday, when the minister said that other immigration services would not be affected by the refugee admission timeline, was he ignorant to this issue or did he just mislead the House?

The Chair: We actually have two points of order at this point.

I will go back to the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill on her earlier point when she transitioned into her next question.

For the benefit of all hon. members, it is true, as I indicated in the opening comments, that generally speaking the respondent should try to put his or her answers in the approximate amount of time as the time taken to pose the question.

That said, members posing questions should be of the understanding that if the brief question would constitute a rather more complex answer, then the Chair will give appropriate time for the minister or parliamentary secretary to respond. To some extent, we try to make sure the time is balanced, but at the same time the idea of committee of the whole is to have a free-flowing exchange, and, to the degree possible, we should try to make sure that the information can be exchanged back and forth in a reasonable fashion. Therefore, I will be watching the balance of time closely, but if it requires a complex response, then time will be given to allow for that.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, far be it for me to utter platitudes, as my friend opposite has indicated. I am trying to answer the questions as clearly as I can. If they are articulated in a clear manner, there will be clear answers.

Government Orders

In terms of the resettlement assistance program, service providers will receive a 25% increase to this year's funding, to \$3.6 million, to ensure they have the supports in place as soon as refugees arrive. Over the next four years, a total of \$335 million will be used for settlement and resettlement services, both in Canada and abroad, in stages, as the needs of Syrian refugees arise.

To return to the previous response, if it was not clear enough for my friend opposite, the \$678 million, in terms of our full costing, is aggregated over a five-year time span, not a single year. That may perhaps add clarity to my response previously.

● (1550)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I find the condescension of my colleague opposite quite refreshing from the party of “sunny ways”.

My colleague did not answer my question. The costs associated with this program are predicated on the assumption that other service lines within CIC will not be affected. The question I asked, given the press release today saying there will be a decision around the call for proposals that will be off put, is whether service lines, such as the spousal sponsorship program, will be seeing extended delays, and, if not, what resources have been allocated to ensure that is not so.

Mr. Arif Virani: It is a completely different category, Mr. Chair. There is no impact that we anticipate because it is a different category.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, to clarify, the parliamentary secretary does not expect to have any service impacts, any increase in service timelines in any other CIC stream due to the Syrian refugee initiative.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, we are continuing to process the other lines of business within the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as we had in the past. At this point, what I can indicate to my friend opposite is that we do not anticipate any impact on those processes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, what is the total number of government-sponsored refugees, and over what time period is the government using to base its cost calculations?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the total number of government-assisted refugees we are anticipating is 25,000 by December 31 of 2016, and that will be made up of 15,000 by February 29, 2016.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, on December 3, the Minister of Immigration was quoted in the *Toronto Sun* as suggesting that the number of government-sponsored refugees could go as high as 50,000.

Is my colleague opposite saying that it is capping it at a number below that?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, my apologies for the delay, but my colleague did a really good job, and I was greeting 50 children with cards for the new refugees.

In terms of the hon. member's question, I must have missed it; I was changing seats. Could the hon. member perhaps ask it again?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship said that the

total number of refugees would be capped at a number less than 50,000, yet the minister was quoted in the *Toronto Sun* as saying that the figures could go as high as 50,000.

I would like the minister to explain to the House which number he is basing his cost calculations on for the Syrian refugee initiative.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, in the first place, those two numbers are not inconsistent with each other.

I said a range of 35,000 to 50,000 refugees; the number of 35,000 is the minimum, and the actual number is yet to be determined by cabinet.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, if the number of government-sponsored refugees has yet to be determined by cabinet, how can anybody in the House have any confidence in the figures that the government is putting forward with regard to the total budgetary figures around the cost of the Syrian refugee initiative?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, if the hon. member does not listen, then she will be confused. The number of government-sponsored refugees is fixed at 25,000, and we have 10,000 coming in that are private. That is a minimum of 35,000, which is fixed. Where it is between 35,000 and 50,000 depends on a cabinet decision still to be taken, but there is absolute clarity in terms of what I just said.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, is the minister suggesting that there are no extra costs associated with private sponsored refugees to the federal government?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, that is not at all what I am suggesting. However, the costs are much less than the costs associated with the government-assisted refugees.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, is the cost associated with waiving the immigration loan program for the number of refugees coming to the country under the initiative included in these estimates, or in the government's cost estimates around the program to date?

● (1555)

Hon. John McCallum: Indeed they are, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, could the minister explain what the total cost of that will be and what his cost assumptions are around that figure?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I am not sure which costs the member is referring to. If it is the total costs of the whole initiative, the number is just under \$700 million. If she is referring to the cost of my department, the total cost of my department would be \$278 million. If she is talking about the settlement and community integration costs, it is \$108 million. If she can tell us what costs she is referring to, I will try to answer.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, what is the total cost associated with waiving the immigration loan program, and what number of refugees is being used to assume the cost calculation around that figure?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, with regard to the cost of waiving the immigration loan program, I do not have that number, but I will get back to the hon. member with it as soon as I can.

Government Orders

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To be clear, Mr. Chair, the minister said that the immigration loan program waiver was included in the budget estimates, but he does not have that figure in front of him at the present time.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, there is \$34.5 million for resettlement assistance program to provide 12 months of income support for clients whose income is insufficient to provide for their needs and/or the needs of their dependants.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I will take that as a yes, Mr. Chair.

I would like to return my focus to housing. Affordable housing is a concern across Canada. There is a big delta between average rent in some cities that we are expecting to see the refugees going to and what the federal government is providing to refugees on an annual basis for support.

I am wondering if the government has calculated what that delta is and if it intends to increase its allocation to Syrian refugees. If so, what is the total expected cost, and is the cost reflected in these estimates?

Hon. John McCallum: As I indicated earlier, Mr. Chair, the total amount that the federal government is putting on the table is just under \$700 million. It is obvious that this is a national project, and the costs should be shared with the private sector and other levels of government.

I am extremely encouraged at the response to date in the private sector. Many people have come back already to provide free or subsidized lodging, and I am confident that there will be many more. It will be a great national effort, including not only government, but private sector as well.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the question I have relates to using private companies to provide housing for Syrian refugees. The minister has said that many organizations are providing housing units at a reduced or free cost.

What sort of contracts will be entered into to ensure that stays the case, and over what period of time? What sort of guarantee is the government providing to the companies, if anything, to ensure that this stays the case? What is the cost associated with the same?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I think the member is unnecessarily suspicious of the private sector. My first reaction is gratitude when the private sector offers to provide free or subsidized housing. I think she should also be grateful to the private sector for coming forward in this way.

Any kind of contractual arrangements will be dealt with. In large measure, the refugees have not arrived yet. The companies have made a very generous offer, and the details will be worked out with them. However, the primary reaction, from me at least, and from the government, is to thank the private sector very much for its help.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am delighted to be here today. I want to thank hon. colleagues for this opportunity to discuss the supplementary estimates. I will be splitting my time today with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

As parliamentarians, one of our greatest responsibilities is our fiduciary responsibility to Canadians. For our system to function

properly, parliamentarians must have access to the information they need to hold the government accountable.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

That is why making the government's activities more open and transparent was a fundamental theme of our election platform. It is also why we promised to enhance this process, beginning with the supplementary estimates (B) being reviewed today.

[*English*]

Because of the timing of the recent election, the fall parliamentary session opened much later than usual and the committees have not yet been struck. As a result, there is not enough time or structure in place for the typical process, where departments and agencies seek approval for supplementary estimates from the relevant parliamentary committees. The reality we face is that commitments made by the previous government led to urgent financial requests by many departments and agencies in the lead-up to the election. This in turn led to cash-flow pressures for the government.

In keeping with the rules and authorities provided by this House, we had a few different options after the election for dealing with this situation. One option would have been to drain the government's contingency reserve, otherwise known as Treasury Board vote 5, and then to use special warrants. This is what many governments have done in the past. However, this would have involved a smaller role for Parliament, and it would have reduced the government's ability to respond to large unforeseen events in the coming months, before the end of the next supply period.

We felt that tabling supplementary estimates was the most open, transparent, and responsible option available to us, given the circumstances. Recognizing that this Parliament is very new, we have limited these estimates to the most urgent requirements, including a vote to replenish the government's \$750-million contingency fund.

Between January and July 2015, the previous government used up \$520 million, more than two-thirds of that fund. This money went to items as large as \$233 million to AECL for its operations, \$99 million to Health Canada for aboriginal health programs, and as small as \$5,100 to Library and Archives Canada for changes in the exchange rate.

Going forward, we will take steps to make it easier for parliamentarians to scrutinize government spending. One way we will do this is by ensuring that information provided in the budget, estimates, and public accounts is better aligned. This will help us to better manage our spending plans, both in terms of how we ask for Parliament's approval of these plans and how we report what was actually spent.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Harmonizing our tools and coordinating deadlines better will also help prevent government funds from lapsing.

[English]

These improvements will also ensure that authorities provided by Parliament are used by departments to provide timely, effective programs and services to Canadians.

We will also publish cost analysis of legislation before Parliament.

The Government of Canada is firmly committed to providing parliamentarians with the tools they need to make informed decisions and to fulfill their fiduciary obligation to Canadians.

I look forward to working with my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House from all parties on these commitments so that we can work together to strengthen Parliament's oversight of government spending.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I appreciate the fact that in Treasury Board one really gets a good sense of the numbers.

Could the minister provide some clarity in regard to some of the things that the member responded to in his short comments that relate directly to the throne speech, to give us a better sense of how the two work together?

• (1605)

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague and friend from Winnipeg North for his hard work in this place.

One of the things that our Prime Minister and our party committed to in the election was more openness and transparency and more respect for Parliament. One of the best ways to accomplish that is to better align budget processes with the estimates process. We will be working hard on that not only in Treasury Board but across government agencies and departments in the coming months, particularly as we lead up to a budget. We will work with the Minister of Finance to better align the budget process with the estimates process. That demonstrates respect not only for taxpayers but also respect for Parliament and citizens of Canada.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I understand that one of the key priorities for the minister's department and a campaign promise of our government is to reform the access to information regime. Could the President of the Treasury Board shed a little more light on the short-term plans or the road map for the reforms that have been committed to?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Chair, I met with the Information Commissioner Madam Legault recently and we discussed the way forward to honour our commitment in the platform. We are also going to engage Parliament in this.

Access to information, and the default being that Canadians deserve to know, is the principle behind our platform and behind our government's commitment to expand access to information in more open and transparent government.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, I was late arriving. I was not at all disturbed to be late because things were in the able hands of my hon. parliamentary secretary. I was late because the member for Davenport had young students on the Hill who produced cards to welcome the refugees from Syria, who are all coming tomorrow night.

They wanted me to talk to them and they asked me some very intelligent questions, these 12-year-olds. It is quite impressive compared to the questions I have heard so far in the House. I was quite bowled over. It is not that the questions in the House were of low quality, it is just that the questions from these young Canadians were of such high quality that I was totally bowled over. I was very happy to meet with them.

One thing I told them was just last weekend I went to an apartment in west Toronto, which could have even been Davenport. People were preparing the apartment for the arrival of Syrian refugees, a mother and her five children. I helped set up the bed in the apartment and then the little girl, about 10 years old, taught me how to say "welcome to Canada" in Arabic, so that I can say that to them. She had to tell me two or three times, but I think it is properly said as [*member spoke in Arabic*]. Those are the words of a 10-year-old girl helping set up an apartment to welcome the Syrian refugees. She was my teacher. If I ever get to meet the Syrian refugees coming by plane, when they arrive in Canada, I will know what to say. I will say [*member spoke in Arabic*].

It is a good expression for all of us in the House to learn, because, as I have said many times, this is not just a governmental project and certainly not a Liberal project. All parties in the House have supported it, all provincial governments across the land have supported it. Even the Governor General, who is the precise definition of non-partisan, was leading the charge. Even beyond that, it is not just governmental at all. It is all Canadians, including the business people to whom I was referring earlier, who have come forward. People with thick wallets and big hearts have come forward to provide free or subsidized accommodation to help us meet the requirements of the refugees.

There will be some trials along the way, but I am sure that in the end, we will welcome them not only with a smile but with roofs over their heads, the necessary language training, all of which is covered in our cost estimates, which brings the relevancy to this debate, and health care. Interim federal health is now fully restored for the Syrian refugees and before too long, after they are housed, healthy, and know a bit of English or French, they will be out in the labour market. Across the country, various groups will help our newcomer friends. Some of them are here already and tomorrow evening will be the first full planeload. Then they will come in larger numbers. I am sure all Canadians will welcome them and soon they will become productive workers.

Government Orders

My colleague here comes from Nova Scotia. I can say that the provinces most enthusiastic to welcome the refugees are provinces with a more sharply aging population, like New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. They are really keen to take lots and lots of refugees. From coast to coast to coast, the whole of Canada—

Hon. Scott Brison: Aging sharply.

Hon. John McCallum: Not you personally; some of your compatriots and I might include myself in that list, but still going strong.

• (1610)

I have lost my train of thought, madam Chair. It must be a sign of aging.

My point is, across the whole country, Canada is giving a very warm welcome to all these Syrian refugees, who will soon be Canadians like all of us.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Chair, I commend the hon. minister, as well as the Minister of Health and the Minister of Defence, for making the effort to go all the way to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and that whole area to actually view the situation on the ground.

I want to put that in contrast to a conversation I had at church on Sunday with a good friend of mine, who is Syrian. His comment to me was that no Christian would ever go to a refugee camp. I frankly found that to be quite surprising. However, there is a huge sectarian conflict going on with Yazidis, Druze, Chaldeans, and Syriacs, etc. I want some assurance that when Canada is welcoming refugees from these camps there is no preferential treatment and there is an equal opportunity for all religious groups to qualify for the generosity Canada is extending to these refugees.

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I assure the member there is no discrimination. Our one and only criterion for selection is vulnerability, and we accept people who are vulnerable irrespective of religion.

I can also assure the member that of the people listed on the UN list, in Jordan for example, only about 15% are in camps. Eighty-five per cent are spread around the rest of the country. I think that addresses one of the issues raised to the member.

• (1615)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his comments. I would also like to thank him for recognizing the tremendous mobilization effort afoot in New Brunswick. There are tremendous community organizations in my community, the Multicultural Association of Fredericton, the military community, Red Cross, local religious groups, and individuals.

Perhaps the member could comment a bit further about the community mobilization afoot in other communities like mine, and perhaps about the reception ongoing right now in New Brunswick, for the benefit of this committee.

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, the member's province was one of the only two where the premier himself actually got heavily engaged and is really enthusiastic. He was talking about

employment opportunities, as well as a place to live, and a job prospect. I would say that New Brunswick was among the most enthusiastic provincial governments with whom I have spoken.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be using my time for questions and answers.

My first question for the minister is, could he inform the House how much of the \$178 million for operating expenditures at Citizenship and Immigration would go toward processing refugee applications overseas?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I do have figures on that. In terms of staff for logistical and delivery services for those overseas, they are broken down. I also have transportation.

I have overseas living costs for staff, which is \$6.4 million. I have visa officers deployed overseas, which is \$4.7 million. I have logistical and service delivery activities at \$2.3 million.

I would have to add them up to get a total figure for the full category the member mentioned, but I do have some of the components.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how much of the \$178 million would go toward processing applications for private sponsorships? I am trying to get the separation between the two categories.

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, the processing of private and government sponsorships are combined together. I do not have a breakdown for that.

However, I have somewhat better numbers for her first question, which includes both private and government. Processing costs overseas are \$6.9 million. Travel costs for temporary duty and support staff are \$6.4 million. Costs for logistical support for overseas operations are \$1.3 million. Emergency locally engaged staff, meaning not Canadian, are \$9 million. Then there is a contingency of 20%. If we include all of that it comes to \$19.1 million.

The Deputy Chair: I just want to reiterate that when the questions are asked, the answers have to be about the same length as the questions. I want to remind the minister to try to stay within that timeline.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, will the government meet its target to have 2,000 government assisted refugees in Canada by December 31?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, that is certainly the objective which we are working very hard to achieve. We had good news yesterday about the exit visa issue being resolved in Lebanon.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the minister has committed \$14 million for personnel and \$156 million for professional and special services. Could the minister explain if this means the department will be relying on consultants, rather than full-time staff?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, no, it does not mean that. The second item that the member has mentioned is not for consultants. We are relying on our own staff.

Government Orders

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, what is the \$156 million for, then?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, IOM. I guess we could call it a consultant, if we wished, but the International Organization for Migration is a wonderful organization whose director was just here. It is its responsibility to do all of the logistical work for us in lining refugees, arranging transport, and that kind of thing.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the minister announced this morning that the interim federal health program is being restored for all Syrian refugees. Could the minister confirm whether the restored interim federal health program is available to all refugees?

• (1620)

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, as of right now, it is available totally to Syrian refugees. Medical practitioners and provinces have been informed of that. In a very short time, the whole thing will be fully restored, but that second component of it has not yet been announced.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, does the minister have a timeline?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, clearly, in our platform, the judge said that it was “cruel and unusual” not to offer it, so we will do it as soon as we possibly can.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, is the funding for the interim federal health program included in the supplementary estimates? If so, how much?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, it is certainly included. I believe that it is about \$6 million, but if that is wrong, I will let the member know in a future question.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, I assume that this is just for the Syrian refugees, then?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, yes.

Also, I was right. It is \$6 million. That is the right answer.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how much of the \$11 million dollars for settlement will go to the municipalities to assist with settlement costs?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, the general procedure is that the costs borne by the federal government go to settlement agencies, which then provide that funding to the refugees themselves and for language training and things of that nature, and not to municipalities directly.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, assuming local governments will assume costs in welcoming the refugees, is there any amount allocated from the supplementary estimates that would be going to municipalities to support them in this work?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, no, not directly. As I said, this is a national project, so we expect all levels of government and all Canadians in all walks of life to do their part. Not every dollar spent by a municipality will be reimbursed by the federal government.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how much of the \$11 million for settlement services will go to the settlement agencies, then?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, the settlement and community integration is \$108.2 million, which will go to

resettlement assistance programs. That is a very major part of the expenditure. It is substantially more than \$11 million.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, is the allocation based on the number of refugees that are assisted by the agency?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, not precisely, but by and large, yes. For example, every refugee family receives an income approximately equal to social assistance. Every refugee receives language training and health care, so that is pretty well proportional per capita to the number of refugees.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, do the supplementary estimates include the \$3.6 million in additional funding announced this morning?

Hon. John McCallum: Yes, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the provinces are going to face extra costs as well because of the influx of the refugees, including in the area of education among other things. Will the government be reimbursing the provinces for those additional costs?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, by and large, it is my same answer. As I said, it is a national project. All levels of government are expected to do their share. The federal government is already putting up almost \$700 million, which is a lot of money. Provinces are responsible for education, so we expect provinces to pay for education without being reimbursed by the federal government.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, what kind of support will the federal government be providing to help refugees find long-term affordable housing? Is that all going to be dependent on donations?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, this is a short-term humanitarian act involving donations. In the medium term, it is of great benefit for Canada. Many of the refugees will require some assistance in the short run, on income and on housing, because they have just arrived from a miserable part of the world and they are here. They will require a bit of time, but sooner rather than later they will get jobs. We have already talked about jobs in New Brunswick and elsewhere. They will find jobs, as was the case with refugees in previous times, from Vietnam and other places.

I am very confident that with some assistance from the business community and Canadians that the great majority of our new Canadian friends will become gainfully employed and will be net contributors to Canada. It is a short-term cost for—

• (1625)

The Deputy Chair: Order, please. The member for Vancouver East.

Government Orders

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, I have no doubt that many of the refugees will be successful in the long term. I am just trying to nail it down in terms of the housing aspect because the cost of housing is super expensive, not just in the city of Vancouver but really in many other parts of Canada as well.

On that note, could the minister advise what is the budget for the temporary accommodations that is included in the supplementary estimates here?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I do not have a precise number for that. I could try to find it. However, I know that our budget does include funding for temporary housing and assistance in finding permanent housing. The refugees can pay a part of the rent out of their own income, which is at social assistance levels.

I have been honest with Canadians that we do have a gap on the housing front, and that is why we are very grateful to the private sector for coming to our help with this part of the program.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, I am very familiar with people on income assistance trying to seek housing which they cannot get because it simply is not affordable.

For the refugees who are coming here, does the minister anticipate that, where the income assistance portion is not going to provide sufficient support for them to get that housing, the private sector will step in and provide that housing for 25,000 government-sponsored refugees?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I would not go that far. I think the help will come from a variety of sources, but I do think the private sector has already stepped in to provide assistance on the housing front. For that I am most grateful and I do expect to see more.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, there is nothing here for permanent housing in the supplementary estimates. In the event that refugees come and are not able to get permanent housing that is affordable to them, and there is no charitable organization or private sector member available to assist, will the minister then provide support in that regard?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, that question has a dozen hypothetical parts, so I do not think I can answer it. I have given the member the outline of our programs. We are providing close to \$700 million. That is a generous amount and I think other Canadians should and will come to the aid of the party as well, for philanthropic reasons among others, because Canadians are generous people and they are already indicating that generosity.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how much of the \$178 million will go toward health screening?

Hon. John McCallum: Health screening or health care, Madam Chair?

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Screening, Madam Chair.

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I do not think the health screening is a part of that component. Interim health care is \$6 million for after the refugees get to Canada. The health screening occurs overseas, and that is a part of the screening for security and for health. I will have to wait a minute before I can get the exact number on the cost of health screening.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, if the minister is getting that, could I also then get the cost for the security portion?

Hon. John McCallum: We are still looking for both, Madam Chair, and I will give them to the member two in one, the security and the health together when we find them.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, in anticipation of that, will the health component also cover the mental health costs for services and provisions for the refugees who may need them?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, that is a good question which we discussed when we had our meeting together.

In the short run, when they are under the extended interim federal health care, counselling is certainly covered. However, when they go on to the provincial health care system, it is really up to the provincial health care system in terms of what level of services in the various health areas are provided.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, in our briefing I asked the minister that question because the issue of course is that some of the challenges in terms of mental health, trauma, etc. may not manifest themselves in the immediate term. Therefore, for the long-term, where would the support come from? I understand now from the minister that this cost will be borne by the provinces.

The charter flights will be arriving daily after this week. Is that going to be the case?

• (1630)

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I cannot give precise dates. On Sundays we may have more than one flight arriving. There may be the odd day when we do not have any. There will be a large volume of flights arriving through the remainder of this month and into the next year.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, could the minister advise if the government has received feedback from the UNHCR on its decision to exclude single young men from resettlement as government assisted refugees?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, we are following the guidelines that the United Nations has put forward, so it would not condemn us for using its own criteria. On the contrary, the head of the UNHCR was extremely complimentary to Canada, saying that if there were one country in the world that could achieve this ambitious settlement plan, that country was Canada.

We are working extremely closely and positively with both the UNHCR and the IOM.

Mrs. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how much is allocated for contingency in the supplementary estimates?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, on operating expenditures, it is 20%; on non-salary, it is 20%; and on votes and contributions, it is 10%.

On the member's previous question, visa officers sent overseas to conduct interviews, process cases, and issue visas comes to \$4.7 million.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I propose to allocate my time with remarks of about 10 minutes and then a question and answer period.

Government Orders

I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Government of Canada to speak about how we will strengthen our access to information system, a key issue facing Treasury Board. We firmly believe that government data and information should be open by default, in formats that are modern and easy to use. We promise to deliver an improved access to information system, because we are committed to upholding the democratic principles of openness and transparency.

We recognize that Canadians cannot meaningfully participate in a democracy without having the information they need. Indeed, we believe that information for which Canadians paid belongs to Canadians. They have every right to access it.

To that end, we will review the Access to Information Act to ensure it provides the openness and accountability Canadians expect. We will ensure that the government is fair, open, and accountable to all Canadians.

Reviewing the access to information system will also bring greater transparency, open the doors for greater public participation in governance, and support the Government of Canada's commitment to evidence-based decision-making.

Canada's access to information legislation has not been substantially updated since 1983. How much our world has changed since then. The proliferation of personal technology, like smart phones, has altered so many aspects of our lives.

We recognize that technology in all forms is changing how citizens interact with their government in powerful ways; so, in the coming months we will look at ways to align Canada's access to information system with those modern realities.

Releasing information in easy to use formats, which will ensure that Canadians have meaningful access to their government, is one of the most important and substantive changes we can make. Our review of the access to information system will explore, among other updates, how we can make usable formats a reality.

Another part of our commitment to openness involves eliminating barriers wherever we can. We committed to Canadians that we would eliminate fees for accessing government information, with the exception of the initial fee for filing a request. We believe that Canadians should not have to foot the bill for information that belongs to them.

In addition to reducing financial barriers, we will look at reducing systemic barriers. For example, we will examine ways to expand the scope of the Access to Information Act so that it applies to the Prime Minister's office, to ministers' offices, and to bodies that support Parliament and the courts.

We will do this because we know that Canadians want us to pull back the curtain on the factors that influence the decisions that affect their lives. Canadians expect to know how and why decisions are made on their behalf, though we also acknowledge the valid and important reasons behind protecting some information.

These reasons include protecting Canadians' personal information, withholding information that would put someone's safety or national security at risk, and ensuring that officials can provide full, free, and frank advice to the government. We will work with all stakeholders to strike the right balance.

The government also recognizes that Canadians want and deserve easier access to their own personal information. We will explore ways to strengthen this aspect of the existing system. We want to create a system that is more nimble, responsive, and convenient.

These kinds of sweeping changes cannot happen in a vacuum. We look forward to working with the Information Commissioner and other interested Canadians on the review of the Access to Information Act. In fact, we consider the Information Commissioner to be an important partner in our review of Canada's access to information system.

Indeed, we heard earlier from the President of the Treasury Board, in answer to a question, that the initial contact, initial meeting, initial approach, has already taken place.

No access to information regime is complete without meaningful and effective oversight. We promised Canadians that we would find ways to empower the Office of the Information Commissioner to order government information to be released in situations where doing so would be in keeping with the purposes of the Access to Information Act.

● (1635)

We look forward to working with the Information Commissioner to foster a strong and responsive access regime.

We also recognize that this cannot be a one-off initiative. We have been witness to many changes in society and in technology since our access to information legislation came into force in 1983. We need to find ways to ensure that the system continues to grow and change alongside us. We cannot allow our access to information practices to become stagnant.

A vibrant and evolving access to information system will support a strong, open, and transparent democracy. One way to ensure the continued strength of the access to information system is to undertake a full legislative review of the Access to Information Act every five years. Legislative reviews provide an important opportunity for Canadians to have their say on access rights and to help us ensure that the system continues to meet their needs.

Given the importance of these changes and their complexity, the government will take the time necessary to hear from interested Canadians on this issue and to fully examine all the options. We will come forward with proposals to enhance and build on the existing strengths in the system.

These are early days. We will announce more details about the review in the coming months.

We look forward to working with all the stakeholders to ensure that we develop balanced, reasonable, and feasible proposals. I welcome the input from the committee members gathered here on ways in which we can enhance our access to information regime.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, the member made reference to access to information. One of the major platforms of the party was to deal with access.

Government Orders

The member will recall that it was not that long ago when the Prime Minister, then as the leader of the Liberal Party, took the initiative on proactive disclosure, believing in the importance of transparency and accountability. I think that had a great deal of influence in wanting to move forward and show more transparency and accountability, which seems to be a common thread for the Prime Minister.

I wonder if the member might want to reflect on the importance of issues such as proactive disclosure and ultimately how access to information is yet another step in what seems to be something that is very important to our Prime Minister and to the Liberal Party of Canada.

• (1640)

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague and friend from Winnipeg North, who can always be counted upon to raise interesting points, and when necessary, ensure that the debate is as fulsome and comprehensive as it can possibly be on virtually any given topic.

The two topics the member raised in his question were proactive disclosure and the commitment of the Prime Minister.

There is no question that, under the leadership of the present Prime Minister, it was the Liberal Party that indeed led the way with respect to proactive disclosure of expenses here in the House of Commons, and he did so on a voluntary basis almost immediately after his appointment as leader. Eventually other parties came along, and eventually the rules were changed such that the process that was put in place by our party was adopted by the House of Commons as a whole.

The other element of the question is the Prime Minister's personal commitment to open government. The private member's bill that was brought forth by the then member for Papineau was about open government. When it came his time on the lottery, that was the topic he chose. It was defeated by the then government, but now we will see it come into government policy through the President of the Treasury Board.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, Treasury Board sets the rules that establish how people, public funds, and government assets are managed. The Treasury Board reviews departmental investment plans and makes decisions that affect services to Canadians. Essentially this is about government's function to serve Canadians well and continuously improve how we do so.

I would like to ask my colleague from Charlottetown how he sees improving the access to information of citizens and organizations to be part of carrying out that mandate of serving Canadians better.

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Chair, it really comes back to bringing government into 2015, into modern times. We have an access to information system that has not been overhauled since 1983. If we look at what has happened in terms of technology, when we look at what has happened in terms of the information age and the availability of information online, we see that legislatively we are way behind. We are way behind society in terms of what the demands are, in terms of what the expectations are, and in terms of the degree to which people want to be involved and informed in the decisions that affect their everyday lives. That is really what this is

about. It is a long-overdue modernization to give Canadians what they want.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Charlottetown, for his insight today into open and transparent government. I would like to ask him his thoughts on our Prime Minister's decision to enable scientists within the federal government to provide Canadians with honest, direct science and facts, and the decision enabling scientists to provide science and data to Canadian citizens, which has been particularly important in recent weeks around climate change but, more importantly, across all government departments and agencies.

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Chair, one of the most common refrains from the opposition benches in the last Parliament was that we were in an environment where the government was driven by ideology and not by evidence. This was certainly characterized in the climate change debate and in the muzzling of scientists.

I was so happy to hear in question period the Minister of Science rise in response to the first question posed to her and say that the war on science is over. It is a good day, it is a new day, and it is one when Canadians can rightly look forward to a change in the approach of government and the respect for science and evidence-based policy going forward.

• (1645)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am wondering about the types of information to which we might have access now, with the restoring of the long-form census, and how long it might be before we can reconstruct some of the information that we have been missing for a few years.

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague from Guelph and welcome him to the House. Guelph has been the beneficiary of some excellent representation in the last Parliament. I have no doubt that he will continue that tradition.

It is so refreshing that one of the first orders of business of this government is to restore the long-form census, to put meaningful action to the commitment to evidence-based policy.

With respect to how long it will take for the changes to bear fruit, which have been implemented virtually on day one, it is difficult to say, but the fact is that we have now set out on the right track, and only good things will come from the newfound respect and regard for evidence.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Madam Chair, I appreciate the question by the member for Guelph—or as I like to call Guelph, the “greater Milton area”. I welcome him to the House.

I have a few questions on finance for the minister. I should mention as well that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member of Parliament for Simcoe—Grey.

I will be brief at the front end. For the edification of the House, I would like to know what the total costs of the salaries are with respect to the immigration portion in the estimates.

Government Orders

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, the salaries for the temporary staff are \$11.7 million, for the non-salary staff \$166.3 million, and the remainder is for grants and contributions.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, how many FTEs are included in the \$11.7 million?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, we have 72 temporary duty positions for 12 weeks.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, based on the 72 FTEs in the \$11.7 million, is it true that \$162,500 per FTE is being charged?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, the 72 temporary duty positions do not equate to FTEs because an FTE is a full-time equivalent and these are only for 12 weeks.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, I asked the hon. minister for the number of FTEs. Perhaps he should give me the number of FTEs and not the metric he gave me.

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I gave the member what I have, which is 72 temporary duty positions for 12 weeks. Perhaps one could convert those into FTEs. However, that was how it was presented to me.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, is that \$162,500 for every temporary duty position?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I do not agree with that math because I failed to mention that along with the 72 temporary duty positions for 12 weeks, we also have 48 full-time positions.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, we know that we are spending \$11.7 million. However, we do not quite know how many people we are spending it on.

Let us try it this way. What will these people do?

• (1650)

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I disagree with that premise. We know exactly what the people there are doing. This may not be in exactly the format the member would prefer to see it, but via temporary duty assignments we have set up visa offices overseas to conduct interviews, process cases, and issue visas. That is very clear and exactly what—

The Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, I appreciate that. I wanted to understand what the salary money was going to.

Does the minister anticipate any new submissions in the supplementary estimates (C) or changes to the main estimates over and above last year's amounts that are significantly higher; in other words, will this be carried forward again?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I am told that the security costs for the work done by the CBSA will be included in the supplementary estimates (C).

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Chair, I would like to remind the hon. minister that there was a budget commitment made by his government to balance the budget in its final year. In doing so, it is my understanding from the mandate letter of the President of the Treasury Board that he needs to conduct a cost-savings analysis within the government and find \$6.5 billion in savings. I would like to know whether the minister plans on asking the President of the

Treasury Board to red circle his department to ensure that no cost cutting will take place within his department during this cost-cutting endeavour.

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I have no intention of proposing that. The costs that are proposed are clearly enunciated in the estimates. In order to achieve the savings that are mentioned, all branches of government will need to make a contribution of some kind. I have had experience in this kind of exercise myself.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Chair, given the many refugees arriving here in Canada from the Syrian region with unique health needs, what are the total expected costs associated with providing health care to these over 25,000 individuals that the minister announced are arriving in 2016, and over the next four years?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, one can break that down by location. In terms of the cost overseas for immigration medical exams, doctors' exams, blood tests, X-rays, etc., it amounts to \$6 million. In terms of the health services that may be needed, interim lodging will cost \$5.3 million. In terms of supplementary estimates for the interim federal health program itself, that cost is \$6 million.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, the minister did not answer my question. I am looking for what the health costs will be for those individuals and some of the things that were not included, such as mental health costs, infectious disease costs, chronic care costs.

Are those things allocated in the minister's total estimates from now for those individuals who are coming forward?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I suspect I did answer the question, which was about health expenditures. I gave three, and the addition of the three is the sum of the federal health expenditures.

However, once the refugees get here, either immediately or within three months, they come under provincial care. The provincial expenditures are not included in the federal estimates.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I also want to be clear, Madam Chair. As the minister has stated before that the provinces would be responsible for any care taking place, my understanding is that in the interim federal health program, those would be covered by the federal government. Is the minister saying the provinces now cover them, or is it the federal government, or are the costs being shared? What is the answer to that?

Hon. John McCallum: As I have made clear in various statements, Madam Chair, we are extending the interim federal health care, including the extended services. The provinces will pick up the health care once a person signs onto provincial health care, but the federal government will continue to pay for the extended services.

Government Orders

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: What coverage is the minister providing, Madam Chair? How many weeks of extended coverage is he covering, so our provincial and municipal counterparts know how many weeks that will be?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, we provide the income support, including the extended health coverage for up to a year.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, what are the specific cost provisions, as I mentioned before, for those things once refugees are on Canadian soil, in terms of mental health and chronic care provisions? Who would be providing compensation to the provinces after the 12 months, or would that not be provided?

• (1655)

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, my understanding is that that would not be provided.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Post-traumatic stress disorder is not something that we care for within 12 months, Madam Chair. Is the minister saying then, in contradiction to what he said a few moments ago here in this House, that he will not be providing that care after 12 months, even though it is a chronic disease that we expect these individuals to have suffered because they are coming from a war-torn country.

Post-traumatic stress frequently is not gone in 12 months. I do not think we can expect that. Are the provinces then taking on that burden?

Hon. John McCallum: Yes, Madam Chair.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: With respect to that, Madam Chair, health care providers, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health physicians across the country, are already extended.

Where does the minister expect to find the individuals today to take care of individuals who will be arriving here in Canada as early as this month or January? Where would those individuals come from? Are they reallocated from local hospitals or from other provincial jurisdictions?

Hon. John McCallum: I am not sure I quite caught that, Madam Chair, but as to the questioning on why the provinces should bear the cost of health care, it is partly because health care is under provincial jurisdiction. We already pay for the transfers. It is also because, as I have said a number of times, this is a national project where every government and every Canadian should step up and bear his or her share of the costs.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, there are only so many psychiatrists and psychologists in this country. Some of them will be reallocated to take care of Syrian refugees, starting as early as this month or next month.

Which Canadians will be giving up their care to make sure that these individuals receive their care? How will we also be training additional individuals to make sure that the refugees are taken care of?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, a lot of these costs are governed by the Canada social transfer.

I think the member should share the welcoming spirit of so many Canadians towards these refugees, rather than using language that

tries to pit refugee against Canadian, whether in terms of psychiatric care or social housing.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Again, Madam Chair, my question for the minister was not about cost. My question was about health care professionals. We have only so many health care professionals in this country. Where are they being reallocated from? Are they coming from local hospitals? Are they coming from the provincial jurisdictions? Where are these individuals being found to take care of Syrian refugees, which we all do agree need that care because they will be suffering from post-traumatic stress?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I think the member overstates the situation. The 25,000 is a large number to bring in in a short time, but it is a very small number relative to 35 million Canadians, relative to 1 million refugees brought in to Germany, and relative to the 10% of the population of Jordan that consists of refugees.

If the member is pretending that this is such an enormous burden for Canada to absorb—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Simcoe—Grey.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, I am not disagreeing with him at all. I think we should be welcoming refugees, and we are welcoming many into my own constituency.

However, I want to be clear. Maybe I can reformulate the question. Does the minister anticipate increased wait times for Canadians and Syrian refugees for access to mental health care services with this anticipated influx?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, I know that the member tries to dress her comments up in pretty garb, but it still appears to me that implicitly, directly, or indirectly, she is pitting Canadians against refugees by the implication that they will deprive Canadians of mental health care and housing, etc.—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Simcoe—Grey.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, I want to be clear. I think all Canadians want to make sure that Syrian refugees, Iraqi refugees, and Canadians are well taken of.

My question is how will we do that? What are the costs associated with doing that? Will we be asking the provinces to train more individuals? That would be outstanding, and I think all Canadians would welcome that. Will we, as a federal government, be training more individuals and paying for that training?

What exactly is the plan to make sure that the care of both Canadians and our new Syrian refugee colleagues who are coming here is provided for? What is the plan? What are the costs? Where are health community resources being reallocated for the immediate need and in anticipation of the long-term need?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, the provinces are certainly making every effort to receive and to prepare for the refugees. We have reinstated the federal health program, including the supplementary elements to assist that process.

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I would say that if the provinces are so concerned, in the way that the member is, about this terrible burden they are about to bear, why is it that 10 out of 10 provinces have supported our project? Why is it that when we add up the provincial commitments, they have oversubscribed and there are more 25,000 agreed to by the provinces?

The member understates the degree of enthusiasm expressed by the provinces themselves and their generosity, instead of—

• (1700)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Simcoe—Grey.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, could I ask a specific question? It being the case that all Canadians are embracing this—as I said, we are accepting many individuals in my own riding—what is the specific amount that is being allocated funding-wise for the training of FTEs, psychiatrists, psychologists, infectious disease specialists, and others, to make sure that Syrian refugees and Canadians are taken care of?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, that is a provincial responsibility, as the member should know.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, my question was whether the federal government would be aiding the provinces with respect to the training costs associated with the increased need for health care professionals for this issue?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, no. The member keeps repeating these questions. The federal government is putting in close to \$700 million in interim federal health care funding, but the overall responsibility for health care rests with the provincial governments.

The member is complaining. The provincial governments are not, because 10 out of 10 have expressed extraordinary enthusiasm for our project and are reacting with generosity, whereas the member seems to be responding in the opposite way.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Madam Chair, how will the wait list for housing be managed by the federal government? Is there an allocation of additional FTEs and individuals to do this, and is there an allocation of specific funding for the plan to be implemented?

Hon. John McCallum: Madam Chair, with respect to housing, I keep having to tell the member about jurisdictional matters. These questions of social housing are largely not federal. Many of them are municipal.

It is our view that refugees should probably not go to the head of the queue and get in front of Canadians who have been waiting a year or more for housing. It is not our decision. That is largely municipal, but I have spoken to over 30 mayors on this topic and they all agree on that particular point.

Our objective will be to help the new refugees find housing without displacing Canadians who have been waiting for a long time for social housing.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be using about 10 minutes of my time to make remarks, and then 5 minutes for questions and answers.

I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the government to address a priority of Treasury Board and the entire government, and that is

the importance of evidence-based decision-making, an issue that was raised earlier by the President of the Treasury Board in this debate.

That brings me to making a couple of remarks before I get into the discussion. I would like to congratulate the two ministers who are at committee of the whole for the first time in their positions. I would like to congratulate all of the new and returning members on both sides of the House for being here. I look forward to a constructive and positive working relationship in the interests of Canadians, as we move forward in this 42nd Parliament.

Evidence-based decision-making is vitally important to Canadians, and it is vitally important to good decision-making by government. That is why it was explicitly set out in our Liberal platform in the recent election.

I will give members a couple of examples of where we committed to restore evidence-based decision-making. One was the restoration of funding for the Experimental Lakes Area, which is an important world-leading facility for research and understanding of the potential collective and individual impacts on our important freshwater waterways in Canada.

Another is a commitment to restoring funding for ocean science and monitoring, which, as a British Columbian, I know is extremely important to our wild salmon, to understanding the impacts on the ecology of our oceans and riparian areas. It will be important as we move forward to implement the recommendations in the Cohen commission report on the Fraser River sockeye salmon.

I also want to speak today about the importance of evidence-based decision-making in my riding of Vancouver Quadra. When the mandatory long-form census was cancelled, I heard from many people across the riding, especially people from the University of British Columbia. I would like to take a moment to congratulate the university on its 100th anniversary. This important research and learning facility ranks frequently in the top 40 of such institutions around the world.

The government has an ambitious plan for bringing real change to Canadians, and we want to make a fundamental change in how evidence is used to effectively deliver on our commitments.

Canada, as a member of the Group of Eight, the United Nations, and the Group of Twenty, needs a strong evidence-based decision-making process to support and promote its views at the international table.

The Canadian government has access to detailed levels of information for over 1,600 government programs, which includes spending and performance data. We will use this evidence to make decisions that meet the needs of Canadians and achieves value for money. That essentially means that our job of serving Canadians will be done cheaper, faster, and better, with good evidence and with science and facts. Countries look to Canada to set this example, and we are excited to be raising the bar.

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The government is also establishing new performance standards, improving the use of evidence and data in program innovation and evaluation, and accelerating and expanding open data initiatives.

The Government of Canada is proud of the many scientists in its ranks who do such important research on agriculture, forestry, biology, and the oceans, as I have mentioned, to name just a few. We take pride in the work that government scientists accomplish. Canadians look forward to hearing Canadian scientists speak about their research, share their results, and make it more accessible.

Our government will use evidence to drive innovation. We are committed to setting aside funding to test and evaluate new approaches to solving problems in government service delivery.

Specifically, as I mentioned, we have restored the mandatory long-form census. As well, we are improving the quality of publicly available data in Canada, and we are developing an innovation agenda which is necessary to the flourishing of Canada's economy in the future.

●(1705)

Collectively, these measures are giving the Government of Canada and our communities key information that we need to best serve Canadians.

Our commitment to the use of evidence extends beyond internal data. The most important evidence comes from Canadians themselves. We will use the feedback we get from Canadians through the extensive consultations we do to ensure we are making the right decisions with the biggest impact.

Without accurate and reliable data, the government cannot review the \$100 billion in tax expenditures each and every year to ensure that program spending continues to meet the needs of Canadians.

We also want to share information, so that provincial and municipal governments can plan ahead and be effective. Everything from transit planning to housing strategies to support for new Canadians becomes much easier when people have data at their fingertips.

I am proud that our government is open to working with organizations and asking others for help. For example, we want to harness this expertise and knowledge and learn how we can use the research that the David Suzuki Foundation has undertaken to guide us when creating our climate change strategy. That is why Dr. Suzuki was one of the many delegates that the government invited to attend the climate change conference in Paris. There were representatives from all levels of government, along with indigenous leaders, non-governmental environmental organizations, business leaders, and youth. I am proud that we are restoring the tradition of having members of civil society contribute their ideas, knowledge, and data to making better decisions at these conferences on climate change.

Our government is also committed to meaningful engagement with Parliament and parliamentarians. This means providing Parliament with the evidence it too needs to make the right decisions. To support this commitment, we are increasing the information value of our documents on spending. Aligning the estimates and budget processes, improving public accounts reporting, and providing Parliament with costing analyses for all of the

legislation will give parliamentarians real access to spending and performance information. This will truly enable parliamentarians to do the jobs they are elected to do on behalf of their constituents, and that is to scrutinize the government's spending.

I am proud of the improvements that we have committed to. The process is already under way. The President of the Treasury Board is working very hard on a number of these initiatives.

I appreciate the privilege of speaking to the important matter of evidence-based decision-making in this committee of the whole.

●(1710)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am wondering what our government is planning in terms of communicating with municipalities, which are quite often on the leading edge of open government when compared to federal government. Can we draw on any kind of support from municipalities in terms of their experiences?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for Guelph for pointing out the importance of decision-making at the community and municipal level.

One of the commitments that we have as a government is to partner with other levels of government. We already saw our Prime Minister do that when he reached out to the provincial premiers to invite them as well to go to Paris, as the process of developing a climate change plan begins under our new government.

Municipalities are a very important part of our infrastructure commitment. We will be working with the municipalities and open government and their initiatives. The two-way learning that we expect will happen is something that I know members of the House are looking forward to.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague from Vancouver Quadra for that speech. It is refreshing to hear the government benches espouse the virtues of evidence-based decision-making.

I know my colleague has served time as the Liberal Party critic for National Defence, and also as a provincial environment minister.

It seems as though most of the time when we talk about evidence-based decision-making, we revert to talking about science and climate change. As the justice critic in the last Parliament, the lack of evidence-based decision-making in criminal justice policy was a hallmark of the previous government, and it has resulted in us having a sizeable agenda going forward.

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My question to the member is twofold. Could she talk a bit about the importance of evidence-based decision-making in her previous portfolio in defence, to the extent that there is a connection there? Also, could the member talk about the importance of the long-form census, the restoration of it, and where it fits in the whole evidence-based decision-making thrust of the government?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Chair, first it is important that government, like any organization that has the mandate to serve people, is continually looking at how it can do that better. That is what the President of the Treasury Board's mandate is all about and what the hard-working people at the Treasury Board are busy with on an ongoing basis.

However, to do continuous improvement, one needs to have the baseline data. We need answers to question like how we are doing: How is it working? When we tried something out, did it work? What is the evidence?

Evidence and data are important in all fields of endeavour. We want to continually keep up to date with what is happening in terms of information technology, the expectations of the public, and we want to improve our delivery of services and processes.

That relates to National Defence. Information about the impacts on some of the men and women in uniform who were in Afghanistan in an operational capacity and who were injured was being hidden. It was very difficult to find out exactly what was happening, how people were doing, and what the rates of suicide were.

It was very difficult for the previous government to do its job and improve services because the data was lacking as to what was actually happening.

With respect to the justice agenda, we know that the data and evidence clearly did not support some of the previous government's agenda. Some of the spokespersons in the United States were talking to Canadians, asking why we were going down that road of the crime and punishment agenda when the evidence did not support the long-term well-being of people in communities.

I am delighted that we will be restoring the focus on evidence-based decision-making in this country.

• (1715)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the member spoke about the unmuzzling of scientists at the government level.

[*Translation*]

She also talked about innovating within government.

[*English*]

She also spoke about her university celebrating a special anniversary. In the riding that I have the pleasure of representing, in Fredericton, I have two universities: the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University. Scientists in those institutions are pleased to see the government moving forward with a scientific agenda, and an agenda that will focus on innovation.

Could the hon. member speak a little about what she is hearing from people at the University of British Columbia as it pertains to science and innovation?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Chair, UBC, as well as the universities he spoke of, are research and learning institutions. They are leadership development institutions. One cannot teach without an evidence-based approach, without science, without data, in whichever field of endeavour the university is working.

What I have heard during the last 10 years is that the disrespect for science and for evidence-based decision-making has been dismaying and that it needs to be restored.

I am pleased to say that is our commitment today.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will give a brief statement, followed by questions. I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Canadians are generous, so we are welcoming the refugees who will be getting off the plane as permanent residents and they expect Parliament to debate important questions of the day, including whether the government has a plan to do this well and allow the resettlement to be successful. That is what we all want.

The sense we have on this side of the chamber is that this is a plan made on the fly and that could lead to poor outcomes for new members of the Canadian family. We only need to look to the Liberal Party platform that the Prime Minister refers to every day in question period to see Liberals changed their plan in the election.

In their first statement on the subject, the Liberals allocated \$250 million in their platform for the Syrian processing resettlement; \$100 million this year for processing and settlement; \$100 million as a new payment to the UNHCR. Then in another document, in the same election campaign, they allocated \$200 million for the same program. Part of that \$200 million was again the \$100 million in new funding for the UNHCR or relief work.

Whether we take it as \$300 million or \$250 million, Liberals' plans were different even during the campaign. One thing was constant. They were going to have a new payment to the UNHCR for relief efforts related to this tragedy.

In the Liberals' November 9 press release, once again the new minister said: \$100 million for processing; \$100 million to the UNHCR for relief. In supplementary estimates we are debating today, \$277 million spent; \$177 million for operational expenditures; and \$99 million for grants. There is no mention of that \$100 million in new spending for UNHCR.

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Why is this missing from the supplementary estimates?

• (1720)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the \$100 million for UNHCR has not disappeared, however, it is not in the estimates of the immigration department. He will find it in the Department of Global Affairs.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, today we have already heard the minister say that he will have supplementary estimates (C) for security measures. Is he now saying there will be supplementary estimates (D) for Global Affairs?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, we should be clear. I am not suggesting any additional supplementary estimates whatsoever from my department. What I said was that certain security measures covered by CBSA would be in supplementary estimates (C). It is my understanding that the \$100 million for UNHCR will be in supplementary estimates (C) for global affairs. However, what the member sees from my department is, to the best of my knowledge, all that Parliament will get on the Syria project.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, the \$700 million over a five-year span that the parliamentary secretary outlined at the beginning, is the minister telling the House that it is only for immigration, or does that include global affairs? Does that include security? Does that include defence?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I can give the member a breakdown. The number is \$280 million for 2015-16 for immigration alone. If he wants the total cost for the Syria project, 2015-16 to 2020-21, then it is \$550.8 million for my department. On the other hand, if he wants the total for the whole of the federal government for the whole of the period, then it would be \$677.9 million.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, if the minister has these costs for five years at just under \$700 million, why are all these new expenditures not in these supplementary estimates?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, perhaps the member could repeat the question. I do not understand.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, the minister is quoting cost certainty here, and his parliamentary secretary did as well, of almost \$700 million over five years. Why are all these new costs not in these supplementary estimates in front of the House now?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, it has not been approved. I cannot speak for all the other departments, but I am telling the member that all of the immigration expenditures are in the supplementary estimates of today. For the other departments, perhaps it is because the money has not been approved by Treasury Board or perhaps for other reasons. The member would have to ask the ministers of those departments if they are not in today's estimates.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, could the minister confirm to the House today that the cost estimate for five years for Immigration alone will be \$700 million, and likely far in excess of \$1 billion when all of the other supplementary—supplementary (C) and other—expenditures come to the House?

• (1725)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, if he is talking about the \$280.2 million, that number is for my department only, and for 2015-

16 only. Clearly, that does not cover the costs of every year. That is not what it says that it covers.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, to steal a line from the new Minister of Environment and Climate Change, it looks like we are dealing with almost a \$700 million floor that the government will then build upon by department.

Since the UNHCR is a body of the United Nations, funded by members through an assessment, has the minister and the government already spoken to UNHCR for the new assessment Canada will have because we have asked it to screen 25,000 refugees? What will our new assessment to UNHCR be?

Hon. John McCallum: The new assessment, the new payment to UNHCR, Mr. Chair? The minister previously has said what our expenditure is over all of these years, and it is if this is a floor. The total planned expenditure for all of the years is \$550.8 million.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Chair, there are three elements to this refugee crisis.

The first is to bring the refugees in, and my colleagues have very quickly pointed out that there is no real plan and that there are huge shortfalls that the minister cannot answer.

The second is to help the refugees in that part of the world. My colleague just talked about UNHCR and the assessment that will come from it.

The third will be the military element, which we will be talking about tomorrow.

My question for the minister is this. Has he looked at using Canadian NGOs to assist at the refugee camps in helping them? That is far cheaper than going to the UNHCR. Has he had a look at that as a proposal?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, to refer back to the earlier question about the contribution to UNHCR, there was an additional \$10 million, which is included in our estimates, to assist with the costs of identifying the people, and that work is done by the UNHCR.

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The answer to the member's other question is that we are relying principally on the United Nations, the UNHCR, to identify the individuals, and on the International Office of Migration to help us with the logistical work to transport and line up the refugees for our processes.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, the United Nations assesses countries. In this case, UNHCR has already assessed us for how to help refugees around the world. Now the government is asking it to do some more work in bringing 25,000 refugees.

Would that assessment be increased and, if it is to be increased, has the minister included that in the estimates he is presenting here?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I just answered that question. I said that we have contributed an additional \$10 million to the UNHCR for the work that it is doing now. It is in these estimates. That is quite apart from the \$100 million that we have contributed as a general gift to the UNHCR.

There is all this sort of gloomy talk about the UNHCR. I would remind the member that the UNHCR went out of its way to praise Canada for our commitment and to say that only Canada would have the ability to settle such a large number of people so quickly. To put it mildly, the UNHCR is very happy with what Canada is doing.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, boiling down that question, can the minister tell us how much humanitarian assistance aid money is going toward helping the Syrian refugees? How much? The total amount.

• (1730)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, in aid money, the total commitment by the federal government is just under \$700 million. If he means the UNHCR, we have made an additional \$100 million contribution. The additional cost that we are contributing for the UNHCR is \$10 million. However, I am afraid I do not know what the word "humanitarian" means in this context.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, the question is whether the Canadian military will be used in any capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Syrian refugees.

Hon. John McCallum: No, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Be very careful before you say that.

The Chair: I am going to interject momentarily. Members may recall at the start of the debate that I asked that comments be directed through the Chair. I sense that there is a bit of back and forth across the aisle using "you", and so on and so forth. Members can certainly direct their comments across the aisle, but they might want to continue to use the third person, the hon. minister, or the hon. member, that sort of thing. We will keep it polite and generous, as we always like to.

That did not take away the time, by the way, for the member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

The hon. member for Durham.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, getting back to my line of questioning about the supplementary estimates, the minister today alluded to the fact that there will be subsequent supplementary estimates likely for CBSA, likely for Global Affairs, but he has quoted to the House an overall cost of \$700 million for the

Immigration portion. Do the other departments have their final five-year budgets for their costs that will be in the next estimates?

Hon. John McCallum: That statement is incorrect, Mr. Chair. The overall cost over all of the years for the immigration department is \$550 million. With respect to the earlier comment about defence, I do not think defence is involved in humanitarian aid, if that was the point. Defence is certainly playing a very major role with logistics and administrative support to CIC officials, a very big role in terms of expediting the medical exams. Therefore, defence is playing a very large role in helping us transfer 25,000 people from that part of the world to Canada.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for clarifying that of that \$700 million, \$500 million will be CIC expenses. It appears that the additional \$200 million is known, so why did the government not bring those figures and breakdowns to the House in these estimates, to give the House adequate time to properly debate this?

My second question within this is, have all of the departments involved, from CBSA through to National Defence, through to development assistance, all assessed their incremental costs as part of either these supplementary estimates or the supplementary estimates to come?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I am here to speak for my department. Some of the questions that the member raises will have to be addressed to ministers of other departments.

However, what I have said, I think, very clearly is that all of the Immigration estimates are complete and we have no plans for numbers in supplementary estimates (C).

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I am still perplexed as to why, if there is certainty with respect to the overall cost of the Syrian refugee initiative, the government is not bringing the full additional costs to the House of Commons in this era of transparency. We owe it to our new permanent residents who will be arriving tomorrow to make sure that our Parliament has the time to make sure its plan, which is apparently budgeted and complete, is before the House. I wonder why that additional \$200 million is not part of these supplemental estimates to bring forward to the House as per our practice.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the hon. member asked a question about estimates and the budget process. CIC's front-end costs were immediate, and for many of the other departments and agencies of government, they are able to cash-manage until the supplementary (C) and main estimates. The member is displaying a lack of understanding of the budgeting process.

One of the things we want to do as a government is not repeat the mistakes of the previous government in terms of failing to align the budget and estimates process.

The previous government, for this fiscal year, actually introduced estimates before it introduced a budget. Of course, it had to do that because it had to delay the budget until after it could do the one-time asset sale of GM shares to create an illusory surplus on the eve of an election. However, it was still unacceptable and unaccountable to Parliament.

• (1735)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, is the new minister then saying to this House that, for instance, CBSA, the Department of National Defence, the RCMP, or a variety of different agencies had budgeted for Syrians on the ground in three countries: Turkey, Beirut, and Jordan? Was that already provided for in the budgetary allotments of those departments, or are there not new costs facing many departments that should be part of these supplemental estimates?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, I was jostling my hon. colleague. I actually have known him for quite a while and quite like the fellow. However, beyond that, the departments he cites actually are in a position where they can cash-manage for a period and are preparing, for instance, for supplementary (C) and main estimates. They are going to prepare Treasury Board submissions and we will deal with those.

The budget process is such that these amounts are budgeted. When departments need additional resources, they come to Treasury Board and we will review them. This is clearly the case with the immigration department. Its costs are largely front-end, which is why these estimates are being tabled today.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be allocating my time so that I have 10 minutes for a speech and then a five-minute question and answer period. I am pleased to stand in this place today on behalf of the government to discuss the important subject of open government, a key priority for the Treasury Board and the entire government.

However, before doing so, as this is the first time I am standing in this House, I would first like to take a moment to thank the constituents of Richmond Hill for giving me the honour of representing them here. I would like to thank my wife, Homeira, my daughter, Nickta, and my son, Meilaud, for supporting me for the last four and a half years as I embarked on this journey. I would like to thank my team for working hard and supporting me, and I would like to thank the more than 740 volunteers who put in a lot of effort to make sure I have the privilege of standing and sitting in the House beside all the hon. members.

The world is changing at a rapid rate. Just look around. About 30 years ago, fax machines were leading edge and information was stored in filing rooms. Today, it is smart phones and social media, big data and high-speed Internet. Technological developments have altered the way people live and interact with one another, but that is only half of the picture. A fundamental change is taking place in the relationship between government and the citizens it represents. This change is happening around the world and right here at home.

Technology is empowering citizens to act on their expectation for a government that is honest, open, and sincere in its efforts to serve the public interest. Canadians are demanding greater openness in government. They are calling for greater participation in government

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decision-making, and they are seeking to make their government more transparent, responsive, and accountable.

In real terms, Canadians want access to the data and information for which they have paid. They want the assurance that comes when a government is transparent and acts with integrity, and they want to be engaged in the activities of the government and in the decisions that affect them. That is what open government is all about. It is about greater transparency and accountability. It is about opening the door to more public participation in the development of government policies and releasing the information that supports government decision-making.

We firmly believe that government information and data should be open by default. When data is published freely in open formats, it can be used for a wide variety of purposes. That means it increases its value.

Take Canada's geospatial data, for example. A recent study estimates that \$695 million is added to Canada's GDP as a result of the use of open geospatial data. However, the study also notes that the full potential of open data will only be realized when we can combine geospatial data with other government open data, such as health, public safety, and climate information.

We know that there is still an untapped wealth of information and data in federal departments and agencies that can be shared with all Canadians. Indeed, there is huge potential in the area of open data. Wherever it is possible, people should no longer have to specifically request data from the government. That information should be made available by default, and it should be published in accessible and open formats on the Government of Canada's open government portal under an unrestrictive licence.

• (1740)

It is therefore important that the government works toward a collective vision for how best to share information that is of interest to all Canadians.

The government has demonstrated its commitment to open government with the unprecedented step of publicly releasing all ministerial mandate letters. Each mandate letter highlights open government as a key priority.

The government has also committed to making government science fully available to the public and allowing government scientists and experts to speak freely about their work to the media and the public. This is an equally important part of an open and transparent government.

Lastly, the government has committed to strengthening the access to information program and will be reviewing the Access to Information Act to ensure the openness and accountability that Canadians rightly seek.

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Clearly, the government is living up to its word.

It is an honour to be sitting in the House.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I welcome the member for Richmond Hill to the House. It could not be more appropriate than for someone with a background in management consulting and information technology to give his maiden speech in the House on open government.

I would invite my colleague to perhaps talk a bit about his background as a management consultant in the information technology field and how it gives him an appreciation of the availability of data, and particularly the availability of data in usable, machine-readable format, and how that is important to business.

• (1745)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Chair, I also congratulate the member for Charlottetown on his re-election. It is definitely a pleasure to be sitting in the House with the member.

The hon. member asked a great question.

One of the most important things about data is how it can be mined and shared and transferred into information to enhance whatever decision an organization or individual needs to make.

Storing data in databases will not serve the country and will not serve any organization as it sits. What needs to happen and what often happens in large organizations is that data is structured and access to it is allowed given certain guidelines, and is turned into information for proper decision-making. As a result, a lot of key performance indicators are developed for people to be able to help manage the business, or manage whatever the body intends to do.

The Chair: Before we carry on, in terms of the format here, I would just like to mention that during the question and comment period of the 15-minute time period, questions would typically be directed to a minister or a parliamentary secretary. We just had an occasion where the opposite happened. Typically, of course, it is the member's 15 minutes. As the member indicated, he was going to take up to 10 minutes for his remarks followed by 5 minutes for questions and comments, at which point the member would typically then put a question to a parliamentary secretary or a minister in this format.

We will carry on with questions and comments. Members can pose questions to a minister or a parliamentary secretary.

I see the hon. member for Whitby standing.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Chair, my question is for the hon. minister and relates to the gathering of this data and how it can be used not only in decision-making but also to have an impact on our economy and allow it to grow based on gathering of data and better decision-making.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the question from the member for Whitby, and I congratulate her on her election to this House.

Our government is committed to evidence-based decision-making. To do that, we need to have the best possible information, whether it

means restoring the long-form census or restoring the capacity of government departments to research and provide sound evidence to decision-makers on which to make decisions.

Science is part of it, but we also need better data, as an example, for the housing market. We are told by bank economists that in Canada today we do not have good, solid data on Canada's housing markets, which are fragmented across the country. That is not helpful in terms of homeowners and investors understanding the housing market to the extent that we ought to, or banks having as much data as they ought to. We are also told by economists that we do not have good labour market data that we need.

The long-form census is a key part of what we will do as a government, but it is only part of that. We will restore investments in science across this Parliament and agencies. We will support science and research in our universities. As my colleague, the parliamentary secretary and member for Charlottetown said earlier, we are committed to open data within government. That we have not had a review or an update of the access to information legislation since the early 1980s is absurd, given the remarkable change, much of which have been technologically driven, since then.

For Canadians, the transparency bus has left the station. Canadians, particularly young Canadians, wonder why more information is not available to them, and they are right. Our Prime Minister's commitment, as an opposition leader, as a leader in our platform, and as we move forward, is very strong. That commitment is something we take very seriously.

We will work with Public Works, for instance, which plays a pivotal role. We will work with all departments and agencies; Treasury Board plays an important role across every department and agency of government on this.

We look forward to engaging Parliament. We intend to really work more closely with parliamentary committees. I have a fairly high opinion of Liberal members of Parliament, but I do believe that members of Parliament from other parties have good ideas too. Those good ideas will help inform better decisions by this House.

When ministers from our government ask critics and opposition members on parliamentary committees for their input, we will be genuinely seeking their input because we want to make better decisions. There are good ideas from all parties in this House of Commons. We intend to work with members of Parliament from every party to help make sure that this Parliament makes the best possible decisions and renders the best public policy to move this country forward.

That is what Canadians want. They want smarter decisions from a less partisan and more constructive Parliament. I am pleased to say to Canadians, that is what they will get from this government.

• (1750)

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister if he has given some thought to the team that he is planning to put in to collect information.

Government Orders

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, we already have within our public service an exceptional team of people across departments and agencies of this government. We have Anita from Immigration, here with us today. We have Yaprak from Treasury Board and Brian. These are just three examples of the exceptional public servants we have serving Canadians every day within the Government of Canada. They will work very hard.

My hon. colleague, the former minister of veterans affairs, a Conservative colleague, just said we would do whatever they say. No, actually we will not do everything that the Public Service asks us to do, but we will seek from them their fearless advice, because we want to know, based on evidence, what the best way forward would be.

We will make the decisions ultimately based on a number of factors, but not before we respect our public servants enough to seek their fearless advice, and we will not muzzle our public servants, as did the previous government.

The Chair: Before we resume debate, I will just clarify the format again for all hon. members. If a member chooses not to share his or her time for the 15 minutes, that member and only that member can then pose questions for the ministers or parliamentary secretaries in this type of format. If members choose to share their time, then it is permissible for other members to pose questions for the ministers or parliamentary secretaries.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Before I ask my first question, I would like to say that our colleagues on the government side have been blinded by their sunny ways. We are here today to determine whether our federal financial resources are being properly used, in the context of refugee resettlement. The government is winging it quite a bit. It seems to be making things up as it goes along.

I have some straightforward questions about defence. My first question goes back to what I just said. Yesterday, the commander of CFB Valcartier, in the Quebec City area, told the media that he had been ordered under Operation PROVISION to ready the base to receive refugees. He did not receive any clear instructions or a budget for this operation. Being a good soldier, he took the initiative of taking \$2.7 million out of his own internal budget to ready the base as best he could, given the mission he had been assigned. He made that statement to journalists who had been invited to visit the base.

Can the minister tell us what an order to ready a military base means and where the money to do so will come from?

• (1755)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I can say that the military base will provide temporary accommodation, if necessary. If government-sponsored refugees arrive and do not have permanent housing right away, they will stay on the military base. This is one of the ways in which the military is helping us in this process. We hope that

refugees will not have to live on military bases, at least not for long, because we hope they will find housing.

Basically, this is the Government of Quebec's responsibility, because in Quebec, the provincial government is looking after that part of the project.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, I understand the minister's answer.

However, every military base in Canada was instructed to prepare, yet they were not given any money to do so. The Valcartier base publicly announced that it had taken \$2.7 million from its own budget. What about the other bases, such as Petawawa, Borden and Trenton? We need to know.

The bases will be there for overflow, which is perfect. However, the money used to set up the bases will not be available for other potentially important future needs of our men and women in uniform.

Similarly, does the minister know approximately how many Canadian Forces troops will be relocated off military bases, if need be? Have plans already been made?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, that would be a question for the Minister of National Defence.

However, if memory serves, he said that regulars would not be displaced. There may be an impact on temporary soldiers, but that will not interrupt the regular operations of our Canadian Forces.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, we understand that none of our troops will be displaced. That is perfect. If I understand correctly, cadet camps will be used on all of the bases. Is that correct?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, yes, that is what I understand, based on what the Minister of National Defence said. However, that is really a question for him and not me.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, my colleague could ask him, since we need to know the costs associated with these issues.

Operation PROVISION, the military operation in support of refugee resettlement, includes two important components. Reserve resources have been requested, and several hundred reservists have started work.

I would like to know which budget will be used to pay these reservists. Will the funds come from the internal budget, the reservists' training budget or a supplementary budget?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, as I have already said, and it is even more clear in this case, reservists and the Department of National Defence's budget do not fall under my jurisdiction. Although I was the defence minister a few years ago, I am not anymore. I therefore cannot answer that question.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, those are all of the questions that I had.

With regard to the points that I made, it is important to understand that we have not been given any specifics on several aspects of the budget. We therefore need more information in that regard.

Government Orders

I am giving my colleague the floor.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for his intervention. As a lieutenant colonel in the Canadian Armed Forces, of course he is extremely concerned about how this operation is impacting our forces here at home.

Of course, I know that everyone at National Defence and Canadian Forces is more than excited to be part of the mission, making sure they are providing the resources we need to do this in an expeditious manner, and making sure the refugees get here securely as well.

As has already been pointed out, though, we are dealing with supplementary estimates (B) and there is not a single red dime in the estimates that accounts for the extra costs that are being incurred by the Canadian Armed Forces. I know the minister has already said this is not about National Defence, but there are costs associated with it. There is the cost of temporary housing that is being done on base with the winterization of cadet barracks. This is a one-time use and of no value to the Canadian Armed Forces down the road. Why are those numbers not in the estimates?

● (1800)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, the President of the Treasury Board just mentioned to me—and it is a similar answer to the one he gave earlier to another question—that sometimes the departments incur these expenditures through cash management in the short run, but if there is an incremental need, those will come up in supplementary estimates (C). That is a general statement, but I cannot speak to the specifics of the defence file.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, we know that 190 troops have been deployed, helping with medical and security screening. We know that there are upwards of 6,000 to 7,000 refugees that could potentially be housed on bases across Canada, predominantly in Ontario and Quebec. There are costs to having refugees on these bases. Is this going to come out of operational budgets, and will this distract from the training, readiness, and capabilities of the Canadian Armed Forces on base?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I have just said it would not detract from the operational forces on the base. One should bear in mind that the vast majority of the refugees coming between now and the end of the year are, in fact, privately sponsored refugees: 8,000 out of 10,000. Not one of those will go on a military base. They will go directly, or almost directly, to the person who sponsored them, whether it is a family member, church group, or whatever. That is only 2,000 across the whole country that might, for a short time, be housed on military bases. If we are lucky, if we have our act together, there may be virtually no one needing to be lodged on military bases. That remains to be seen.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, we already know they are making accommodations for up to 6,000 to 7,000 refugees on base. There were orders to leave quarters given to members of the Canadian Armed Forces, many of them cadets in training. These are people who are trying to advance their careers, who are actually trying to move up the rank system. There has been disruption to those career paths for those professionals in the Canadian Armed Forces.

More importantly, we know that there have been tenders. I do not know if they followed Treasury Board guidelines or not, but there have been contracts issued to allow the winterization of cadet barracks. These are summer barracks that are used in places like CFB Borden and down in Trenton. Therefore, we need to know where those dollars are coming from. It is my understanding that they are coming out of the operational budgets of each individual base. These monies are very scarce and well used for the overall operational activities of the Canadian Armed Forces. Why does the government not have those dollars in these estimates?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have spoken with personnel at the Aldershot reserve base in my riding. I have also spoken with defence personnel who were active when the Kosovar refugees came some time ago. They are absolutely enthusiastic about participating in this great national project of welcoming the Syrian refugees.

The budgeting process is such that DND has, within its \$13.6 billion operating budget, the capacity to handle the costs incurred in this process. In the future, if there are incremental costs, they can submit them to Treasury Board for supplementary estimates (C) or the main estimates.

● (1805)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, we know there were orders given to all bases to be ready. Orders were handed out, and in some bases upwards of 400 people were forced to leave quarters. Now the member is saying that they may not be able to use all that space, that it might not be needed at all, according to the Minister of Immigration.

Again, is there a plan? What exactly is going on here? Did it change?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, one has to understand that when one is bringing over 25,000 people from Jordan and Lebanon, there are many moving parts. That is why we have contingencies in our estimates. We are being fiscally prudent.

One does not know months in advance precisely how much accommodation will be available in every town, village, and city across the country, so we make an allowance so in case accommodation is not ready elsewhere, there is temporary accommodation provided.

That does not mean there is not a plan. This means there is a prudent plan that deals with these possible contingencies.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, I guess there are changes we are dealing with. When we look back to during the election, the Liberals were talking about 25,000 by December 31. Here we are in the first part of December and we still have not seen the plane loads arrive.

How many Syrian refugees arrived between November 4 and today? How many more are expected from here on in? Is that why the plan has changed? How is that impacting the readiness of the Canadian Armed Forces bases?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I dispute virtually all the premises of those questions.

Government Orders

The plan changed once. We announced the change about bringing in 25,000 by the end of the year. We listened to Canadians to do it right. If it takes a little extra time to do it right, then it takes the time, and that is what we have done.

Since that time, we have had one single plan, and because of the factors I have just mentioned, it is normal that we have temporary accommodation available in case it is needed.

In answer to the member's question about numbers, the target is 10,000 by the end of this year; 416 have arrived since November 4; almost 12,000 are in the process of being screened, and there are more numbers.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, the question is how many of those applications and those refugees who are arriving right now were actually processed before October 19? Also, let us ensure we do this right so we do not need to use any of the CF bases unless it absolutely is a last resort.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, the member should understand that not every event in every town and village can be predicted in advance, and it is always good to have reserves and contingencies.

Should the permanent accommodation not be available when they arrive, we do not want to throw them out in the streets. The option is to have the military base available should that need arise. If we were not planning for that contingency, we would be accused of irresponsibility.

The Chair: Order, please. We are out of time. This will be the last question in this round.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister to commit to using Canadian Forces bases for housing only as a last resort when there is no option available in communities. We all know about the security needs, and the needs of our own troops.

When refugees are being housed on base, who is paying for their lodging, transportation, food, and accommodation? Where will they be getting their medical attention? Will it be from CF base doctors? I am including those suffering from PTSD.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, he seems to say that we do not have a plan, but using the bases as a last resort is the plan. We do have a plan to use them as a last resort, should they be needed. It is a prudent plan and it allows for various contingencies.

The cost of temporary accommodation on the base is, indeed, included in the supplementary estimates that he has before him.

• (1810)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to use my time by allocating five minutes to questions.

I would like to take this opportunity, since it is the first time I am rising in this place, to thank the voters of Mount Royal for electing me.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to congratulate all of the other members of the House on getting elected.

[*English*]

One of the things that I always said in my experience as a mayor is that politics is best done when we all work together, and I hope in the coming years to work together with all members of this place.

I am very proud to rise on a question of appropriations related to the Syrian refugees. As we all know, Canada is a country that has a history of welcoming refugees. My own family came to Canada over a century ago, fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Many people in the House have had similar experiences themselves, or via their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. We all join together in wanting to welcome people, because Canada has been at its best when it was welcoming, and at its worst when it closed its doors.

As members know, we have to get things right, so I am pleased to speak today both on the security aspects that are of rightful concern to many Canadians and on the health aspects regarding the refugee resettlement in Canada, which are also of rightful concern to many Canadians.

Resettling refugees is a national effort. It will require significant coordination and support, beginning, of course, with members of this place. I want to address how the government will select and process Syrian refugees overseas. This work represents the second phase of our announced five-phase national plan. I will tell the House about how the government is making sure that refugees meet security requirements prior to their arrival in this country and what kind of medical screening they will undergo. I will also make clear the costs that these efforts entail.

To meet its commitment of Syrian refugee resettlement, Canada will work with the governments of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, along with international and Canadian partners. This will be to identify government assisted refugees. We are also, as the minister clearly stated, processing privately sponsored refugees to meet the goal of 25,000 by the end of February, 2016.

To identify UN registered Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, the Government of Canada is working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The government has already begun contacting refugees to determine whether they are interested in coming to Canada. The UNHCR has already identified groups of people whom it believes are eligible for resettlement in the west. Another thing that I want to reiterate is our commitment to taking the refugees who are the most vulnerable, which would include members of religious minorities and others, like gays and lesbians, who are subject to persecution.

The government will process refugees who want to make the journey to our country at two dedicated contact centres, one in Amman, Jordan, and one in Beirut. These offices will be staffed by experienced immigration officers, as well as other government officials and security partners.

Government Orders

Protecting the safety, security, and health of Canadians and refugees will be a key factor guiding our actions throughout this initiative. The timeline of the government, which has been set out, will allow us to complete refugee processing overseas while doing robust health and security screening. The officers involved will take the time to screen refugees carefully before accepting them for resettlement in Canada. As the minister has stated, if there are any red flags, those refugees will not be processed in this early batch of refugees.

Security screening will include collecting biographical information and biometrics, such as fingerprints and digital photos. These will be checked against immigration, law enforcement, and security databases.

[*Translation*]

All of the cases will be dealt with in accordance with the procedures that are currently in place. If additional information is required on a particular case, it will be put aside.

[*English*]

Screening will also include full medical exams. This will include checking for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis. Once perspective refugees have undergone screening, those selected will receive permanent resident visas. We will then prepare to bring them to Canada.

The government is planning to transport refugees using chartered aircraft and military planes. The International Organization for Migration, a humanitarian agency that specializes in coordinating the travel of large groups, will manage the operation. It has previously worked with the Government of Canada and will ensure that migration is safe and orderly.

Statistics on the department's website are helping to telling the story of where Canada stands in processing the refugees it has committed to bringing here. The website gives up-to-date numbers, showing refugees who have arrived in Canada since the government made its commitment to welcoming 25,000 Syrians to this country.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the previous government on accepting Iraqi refugees, and doing so much to bring Iraqi refugees to Canada. We need to care for people from all over. Nobody has a monopoly on virtue, and so I want to congratulate the previous government.

The federal government has already announced its financial commitment to this massive effort of identifying, screening, transporting, and welcoming these thousands of Syrian refugees. As we move forward on this great national project, we must contend with the cost of processing applications overseas. We anticipate these costs to be between \$40 million and \$50 million across all areas of government, with \$19.1 million at IRCC.

Let me remind the House that these costs are actually lower than if we did this job in country. I think we all agree, as parliamentarians, that we are very happy that the security issues are being dealt with abroad before anybody arrives in Canada.

Funding will be closely monitored, controlled, and reported on, and I ask hon. members to approve the appropriations we have set aside under these supplementary estimates.

What we have before us is not a partisan project; it is a Canadian project. All members of this chamber, from whatever parties they come from, should be onside with an effort such as this. As I stated, this is bringing out what is best in us as Canadians.

Resettling refugees is a proud part of the Canadian humanitarian tradition. It demonstrates to the world that we have a strong moral compass to help people who are displaced and in need of protection.

I believe that this is a time for Canadians to come together and to put our hearts and minds together to welcome these refugees. Let us show the world what Canada is made of. As my colleague said earlier, let us get this job done; let us get it done well; and let us get it done all together.

● (1815)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I first want to congratulate my friend from Mount Royal for his maiden address in the House of Commons. He has some big shoes to fill as well, given his predecessor who occupied the seat before him.

My questions deal with the issues that the member raised in his address.

To the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, specifically with respect to the appropriations that are before the House today, it is my understanding that \$3.6 million of it is to deal with 23 welcoming centres that are initially going to be taking in the refugees. Is there anything within the current appropriations that deals with other settlement agencies that are also assisting inbound Syrian refugees coming to Canada?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the member is right. There are 23 agencies, and the \$3.6 million represents a 25% increase, which reflects these refugee settlement agencies that are crucial to getting the job done, to actually settling the refugees coming in. Given the large numbers that they have to deal with, it was appropriate.

My understanding is that there are also 13 such agencies in Quebec, but they are funded separately, through a separate transfer to the Government of Quebec. I see that my Quebec colleague is nodding. Therefore, that aspect of it is handled by the Government of Quebec.

However, there are 23 agencies that have just received a 25% increase in their budget from the federal government.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Chair, it is my understanding, then, that these particular organizations are the only ones that are being dealt with under the current appropriation.

Are there plans by the ministry to deal with other agencies that are also working on this particular file somewhere down the line? Would that be appropriately dealt with in future supplementary estimates, or is that a decision that has yet to be taken by cabinet?

● (1820)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I can answer in general terms that the answer is yes. I do not think that such a decision is imminent in terms of announcement, but certainly there are other agencies out there that are really important to our settlement efforts, and it is not our plan to neglect them.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as we know, the government is attempting to bring 10,000 refugees in by the end of this year. We have 25,000 as a set goal, and that is going to be happening sometime in 2016. The second batch, if I can call it that, will be sometime in February or March. When does the government anticipate that the full 25,000 government-sponsored refugees will be in Canada?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, as I have said recently, the likely number of refugees from Syria, between the time the government assumed office and the end of next year, is 35,000 to 50,000. The plan is that, by the end of this calendar year, we will have admitted 15,000 government-assisted refugees and 10,000 privately sponsored ones. We are 10,000 short on the government side, and we will admit that number before the end of 2016, but we can absolutely guarantee by the end of 2016.

In addition, there will be privately sponsored refugees coming to Canada in 2016. The number of those depends partly on the demand by Canadians—how many Canadians want to sponsor—and partly on the decision by the government as to how many it can afford to process. The final decision on that has to be made by the cabinet, but I can say, in round numbers, the range of total refugees from Syria would be 35,000 to 50,000.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, one of the things we know about the refugee situation is that there seems to be a great deal of support from the provinces. This is not being driven just by the Government of Canada. One could ultimately argue it is being driven by the population as a whole.

What has been really encouraging is the number of provinces getting involved and trying to bring in refugees. Perhaps the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship could comment on the type of support that has been received from provinces from coast to coast.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, that is absolutely right.

To return to my other colleague very briefly, there are service provider organizations, as we call them, as well. There is a large number of those and there is already funding built in for them to receive an increase, but that has not been announced or determined explicitly yet. That will be coming.

To my other colleague, I would say it is absolutely true. I have spoken to more than 30 mayors and every provincial immigration minister, and one indication of enthusiasm is that, when we add up what all the provinces say they will commit to bring in, we get a number bigger than 25,000. They have over-subscribed, and that is a numerical indicator of enthusiasm. It is not to say that the number promised are two feet on the ground, but it certainly is something in that direction.

That is a sign of the encouragement of all of our provincial governments, matched by the enthusiasm we see on the ground by Canadians, matched by increasing numbers of dollars contributed by businesses, and all of that adds up to a truly national project to bring these refugees to Canada.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the people of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne for their support in the most recent election.

[*English*]

I know this is a provincial jurisdiction, but in terms of integrating the Syrian refugees into Canada, helping them to find good jobs and retaining those good jobs, are there any plans to work with the provinces on the recognition of foreign credentials, whether through the PLAR, prior learning assessment and recognition for the rest of Canada, or Reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences in Québec?

[*Translation*]

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, that is a very good question. When I was asked what our priority was, I answered that we had three: housing, housing, and housing. In one sense, that is true.

[*English*]

However, in another sense an equally big priority is jobs, because in the short-run this is a great humanitarian gesture. We are reaching out to our fellow human beings in distress and there is a cost. However, in the medium-run, as was the case with former waves of refugees from Vietnam and elsewhere, they have found jobs and we are reaching out to provincial governments and to business to help them get jobs.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to share my time with my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona. We would like to use all of the time available for our questions.

My first question is about compensation for Quebec.

Since Quebec has its own refugee programs, what compensation will it receive? Will that be adjusted if Quebec ends up taking in more refugees than planned?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, the Canada-Quebec Accord Relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens has been in place for a long time now—since the Mulroney era, if I am not mistaken. That means Quebec has a special role to play.

This year, Quebec is receiving \$340 million from the federal government. It is fair to say that that is a generous amount compared to what the other provinces receive. That accord worked well.

Naturally, the more immigrants and refugees Quebec accepts, the more money it should get. We are in daily contact with our Quebec counterparts, and we have an extremely good relationship with them. Quebec will receive more money as a share of increasing net federal spending and in proportion to the number of immigrants.

[*English*]

The Chair: Order. We are well over time there.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, this morning, the minister announced that the interim federal health program would be reinstated for Syrian refugees.

Can the minister confirm that the interim federal health program will also be reinstated for all other refugees?

When will the government keep its election promise to restore full health care coverage?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, with respect to Syrian refugees, that coverage was restored a few weeks ago, but that was not clear to all doctors in Canada, so I clarified that today. We sent messages to everyone in the health care field and to provincial ministers clearly stating that the program had been reinstated for Syrian refugees.

With respect to other refugees, we made a clear promise during the campaign to restore the program in full for all refugees. That has not yet been done, but it will be done as soon as possible.

• (1830)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, if possible, I would also like to know how many government-sponsored refugees have been identified so far.

How many does the minister think will arrive in 2015 and in the first few months of 2016?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Chair, I am not sure whether the member is talking about Syrian refugees, but I imagine she is. The number of Syrian refugees who have arrived since November 4 is 416. By the end of the year, there should be 10,000. By the end of February, the total should be 25,000.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a few questions for the hon. President of the Treasury Board with respect to the allocations and estimates for the contingency fund.

I have a question about some of the spending that was made to date out of that contingency fund, particularly the biggest envelope, which was the AECL spending out of that contingency.

Do the spending and the costs associated with the privatization of operations represent an expansion of services covered under the contract, or do they represent a revision of costs for services already under contract?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I worked with the father of the hon. member in this place. He was a fine man and great parliamentarian, and the hon. member has big shoes, or big Birkenstocks, to fill.

On the question, this was a commitment made by the previous government. Under the new government-owned contractor-operated model, AECL is now responsible to meet its mandate and objectives for the Canadian nuclear laboratories.

The funding of \$232.8 million has been provided to manage Canada's radioactive waste and decommissioning, provide nuclear expertise to support federal responsibilities, and offer services to users of the Canadian nuclear laboratories on commercial terms

established previously. It is a significant sum, and I appreciate the member's question.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, I was pleased to hear in the President of the Treasury Board's earlier remarks an acknowledgement, and I agree with him that spending money out of the contingency fund is by far and away not the most transparent way to conduct the spending of government.

Given that the member agrees with that and given that part of the purpose of the estimates is to replenish that contingency fund, presumably so it is available to be spent, would he agree that having the President of the Treasury Board come to the committee for government operations and estimates at the soonest available opportunity after an incident of spending out of that contingency fund would be the best way to preserve the prerogative of Treasury Board with respect to that fund and alert Parliament in a prompt and appropriate way about how the government is spending that money?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Chair, I speak on behalf of all ministers in our government, who look forward to engaging with committees and to appearing before committees, and to defending our estimates before committees, and beyond that to engaging committees in a review of and reform of our procedures around estimates. There needs to be a better alignment between budgeting and the estimates process. That is essential to have respect for Parliament and to enable members of Parliament to actually know what they are voting on and what the cost of legislation is.

I am going to try not to be partisan in terms of reflecting on the previous government's behaviour in this way. I want to speak to the future. We intend to work with members of Parliament from all parties to do a better job of fortifying our ability as members of Parliament to do our jobs on behalf of Canadians and to hold government to account. That is a critical part of their job as members of Parliament.

• (1835)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, do we have a commitment from the minister to appear promptly before committee after spending is authorized by Treasury Board out of the contingency fund?

Hon. Scott Brison: The answer would be yes, Mr. Chair. We will do that and I look forward to doing it. Beyond that, we will be actively engaged with committees, both me as President of Treasury Board and my parliamentary secretary, the member for Vancouver Quadra. We will be engaged with the government operations committee and will also be engaged in the ethics committee, for instance, when we are talking about expanding and modernizing access to information. We will be engaging Parliament in that.

We believe we will make better decisions as a government with the full engagement of members of Parliament from all parties through the committee process. Committees are not going to be branch plants of ministers' offices under this government; they are going to be partners in progress as we build a better Canada.

[Translation]

The Chair: It being 6:37 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), all votes are deemed reported.

The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

Government Orders

[English]

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: Before we adjourn, it has come to my attention that we have an official with us this evening who has been in the service of the House for 29 years. Mr. Luc Fortin, who is seated at my left at the Table, finishes his assignment here with the House this evening. He has given incredibly remarkable service to members and the House and to all of the various departments he has served. We are going to miss him.

Luc, we wish you and your family all the best in the years ahead, good health, and wonderful adventures ahead.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:37 p.m.)

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