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Friday, May 6, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 6, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016, NO. 1

The House resumed from May 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has seven minutes left for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North made a strong case yesterday for the fact that the Liberal budget would benefit all Canadians. That is who Liberals are; that is what Liberals do.

The New Democrats want us not to post a deficit. They promised austerity. The Conservatives, of course, want us to do as they say, not as they do. Indeed, the Conservatives sank us over \$1 billion per month into the hole during a decade in office. If we had something to show for it, I would not object so strenuously.

Borrowing money to invest helps Canadians. Building infrastructure at short-term cost brings us long-term gain. Being an active member of society, as a government, is to the benefit of all and is a key part of our role. However, the Conservatives did not do any of that. The last time they took us from deficit to surplus was in the 19th century, back before they could say that money could be flushed down the toilet because flushing toilets had not been invented, so there was no such analogy.

Indeed, the great majority of Canada's debt is Conservative-incurred debt, but the great majority of Canadian infrastructure is Liberal-built infrastructure. The Conservatives were so bad at managing the country that they left us penniless.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the commentary, and my colleague made a number of valid points.

For me, when I take a look at this particular budget implementation bill, I would suggest that all members of this House should be voting in favour of it. I believe that is the case because what Canadians want is to be able to see a government that truly cares and wants to make a difference.

This budget would make a difference in a very tangible way. Even for the Conservatives who would like to say that they are big fans of tax cuts, there is good news. There is a substantial middle-class tax cut for more than nine million Canadians. For those New Democrats who want to see more progressive social planning, there is good news. Within this budget, they will see the Canada child benefit plan that would assist those individuals who are in need the most: under that \$45,000, those single parents would receive literally hundreds of dollars more a month as a direct result of this particular budget. This is a good-news budget.

It is a budget that would invest in Canada's infrastructure in every region of the country. If there is ever a reason to vote yes for a piece of legislation, I would suggest that all members of the House should get on board and support this budget, because we know an overwhelming number of Canadians support this budget. I would encourage all members to vote yes on this budget.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always disappointing for me to hear the hatred and disrespect of parties across the way in this place.

When we look at this budget, we see all the many broken promises: way past the \$10 billion deficit at the beginning, never going to balance it in this term, and the things that are misleading Canadians, essentially. The Liberals say there would be tax cuts, but when we add it all up, Canadians see that they would be paying more tax, not less.

My question for the member is this. The Liberals talk about being fact and evidence based. Why are they only fact and evidence based with certain facts and not with all of the facts?

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that, in this budget implementation bill, we are seeing a tax cut to the middle class. Hundreds of millions of dollars would be put into the pockets of the middle class. People across this great land would benefit from that. Whether they are factory workers or health care workers, so many individuals would get more money as a direct result of this budget. That is important because by investing in Canada's middle class, we are investing in Canada's future and our economy. If we give more disposable income to the middle class, it in essence increases disposable income, which helps drive the economy.

That means that, if they have a small business, for example, they would have more customers going to their business. That creates more opportunities. That is why, if there is an overriding theme of this budget, it is about investing in the middle class, investing in Canada's economy, and providing more hope for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a real treat to hear my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, talk about all of the great things in this budget.

I am from a part of the Gaspé that has been hit hard by the economic situation. Businesses have closed their doors, jobs are getting harder and harder to come by, and families are leaving our regions for larger centres to find work and ply their trades. I was therefore very glad to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about how this budget will help the regions.

I would like him to elaborate on the specific elements in our budget that will help the regions.

• (1010)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, an aspect of this budget that I think we can really treasure is the fact that the Government of Canada believes in rural Canada. There are a number of initiatives to support rural communities. One of the biggest things is recognizing the importance of the Internet to rural communities, whether for private use or small business use. There are ways we can expand that and look at diversifying rural communities so that they are not as dependent on one or two businesses.

We believe that we need to invest and to be there, and that is one of the reasons the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has spoken so avidly about the importance of supply management. It is one of the reasons for some of the changes in Bill C-10. It is not just the city of Montreal but the entire province that is incorporated in terms of the potential for our aerospace industry, and that same principle applies for Manitoba and Ontario.

It is a different attitude. It is an attitude that shows we understand the importance of rural Canadians and their way of life. We want to be there to support them in a very real and tangible way.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Bill C-15.

First, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague the hon. member for Milton for leading Canada's official opposition on this finance portfolio. I would also like to thank my other colleagues

who have spoken about this very important topic for their informative speeches.

As we all know, this is a bill that would affect all Canadians. Before I get going, I would like to say I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Chilliwack—Hope.

As the department of finance and parliamentary budget officer have shown, and despite what my friends across the aisle continue to say, when the Liberal government was elected in October, the previous government had left it with a surplus. This has been confirmed time and time again.

It was also left with a balanced budget. However, in the first few months, the Liberals not only burned through the surplus that was left to them, but they also drafted a budget that would run a deficit of at least \$20 billion in the first fiscal year alone. Over the next five years, about \$100 billion would be added to Canada's national debt. That would also mean billions more just to service the interest on that national debt.

This is all despite an election promise to deficit-spend on infrastructure. However, the significant portion of that funding would be on program spending. That means it is permanent and locked in. That also means future tax increases or deep spending cuts later on down the line.

This plan would ruin any chance of Canada returning to a balanced budget, despite the Liberals promising that in the last federal election.

As everyday Canadians know, we cannot live outside our means. That is exactly what the government is doing. At some point, the bill needs to be paid back. How is the government planning on paying that back? Which programs and services would be cut? Let us take a look at the specifics of this bill.

My riding is full of small businesses, and as we all know, small businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy. Small business owners know that they cannot spend money they do not have. In order to survive as a business, they must make money.

It is for that reason that, in my riding, they just do not understand why the government continues to squeeze every last cent from the hands of these valuable job creators. It is perplexing that the Liberals would decide not to help them out. Our government laid the groundwork for a decrease in taxes on small businesses, a decrease the Liberals themselves committed to in the last federal election campaign.

Once again, the Liberals have reneged on a promise, another commitment during that election campaign. According to Finance Canada, this broken promise would cost small business owners an estimated \$2.2 billion over the next four years. That is \$2.2 billion that these businesses could be using to expand their operations, invest in research and development, hire more staff, contribute to the economy, and growth wealth. Unfortunately, the Liberals do not seem to be too concerned about burdening small businesses.

Government Orders

As well, agriculture is a crucial industry across Canada, including in Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock. It provides the livelihoods of many Canadians, coast to coast to coast. Yet, with all the money the government is dishing out, it neglected to offer any new support to the agricultural industry. The livelihoods of many constituents in my riding are based on agriculture, and this budget completely ignores them.

The budget has no plans to improve the movement of grain, and the Liberals have delayed ratifying the trans-Pacific partnership. When a budget ignores agriculture, it ignores a huge portion of Canadians.

While there are many problems with the budget bill, I would be remiss not to mention that there are sections that would be good for Canada. One of those is the government's promise to continue to expand access to broadband Internet for rural and remote Canadians. In ridings like mine, many Canadians do not have access to high-speed Internet. As we all know, in today's global economy, not having reliable high-speed Internet costs Canadians jobs and business.

The investment of \$500 million would go a long way to connecting even more Canadians with reliable high-speed Internet, and build on the progress made by the previous Conservative government, which expanded access to high-speed Internet right across rural Canada, including my riding. Again, there are still gaps, and every party committed to fixing those, and we do appreciate that.

•(1015)

Our men and women in uniform put their lives on the line every day for our values and freedoms. We, as legislators, need to ensure that members of the Canadian Armed Forces have all the tools, training, and equipment they need to carry out their assignments. It is therefore very troubling to see the Liberal government reallocating \$3.7 billion over the next five years for future purchases. Large-scale purchases are not a simple process, as we all know, but we need to ensure that the funding is available instead of taking that away.

This budget did provide some funds to the infrastructure needs of the Canadian Armed Forces. I believe this is not enough to ensure the long-term viability of our forces.

Our previous government was responsible for signing trade agreements right across the globe. I was very pleased to see that the Liberal government is continuing our work and expanding access to markets all across the world. This will be good for Canadian businesses, absolutely. I hope that the government ratifies the TPP and continues to help Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Trade agreements like the TPP will give Canadians access to about 800 million potential new customers. These types of agreements are crucial in ridings like mine.

I have already spoken on the effect that the bill will have on small businesses, specifically because their taxes will not be going down as was promised.

The bill will directly hurt families. Families in Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock are very active. I think we all agree that it is important to keep families active, busy, and having fun. It is a theme that I am sure is similar in every riding, no matter where we are from in this great country. It is not only a trend in sports like hockey,

swimming, soccer, baseball, and basketball, but also activities like music, art, and dance classes.

Many of these are very important to people in my riding, but with the Liberals cancelling the tax cuts for fitness and arts, families will not be able to cope. It makes it harder for them. Costs related to many of these activities can rise very quickly, as we know. Anyone who has children enrolled in minor hockey knows that all too well.

We all know that families work hard for their money. They deserve a helping hand.

I will note that while the Canada child tax benefit will help some Canadian families, unfortunately, it will support fewer middle-class families than the previous universal child care benefit.

The bill is eliminating income splitting for families with children, cancelling plans to expand tax-free savings accounts, while at the same time claiming to be helping Canadians.

Even the Liberals' so-called middle-class tax cut will hurt the families that they say they want to help. Given that a large number of families in my riding earn less than \$45,000 a year, they will receive absolutely zero from that so-called middle-class tax cut.

Since 2008, the Government of Canada has invested over \$200 million in my riding for infrastructure. These were important investments, in programs from new horizons for seniors to municipal infrastructure. Arenas were built. Airports were expanded. Libraries and sports fields were built. Road and bridges were refurbished, and the list goes on.

These investments benefited people from all walks of life. I sincerely hope that the government will continue this strong record in investments, not only in my riding, but right across Canada.

The Liberal budget is very concerning for all Canadians. As I have said before, they know that governments cannot spend their way into prosperity. If that were the case, Ontario would be the economic engine of Canada. We all know it is far from that: over a decade of deficit spending, and where did it get us? That is where we are now.

The bill offers high taxes, billions of dollars in new debt, no plan for creating jobs, and all of this despite being left with a balanced budget and a surplus. When we left office, Canadians had the lowest taxes in 50 years and the best job-creation record in the G7. In just a few months, the Liberals had squandered all of that.

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is running out, and I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech, which I found intriguing.

The Canada child benefit that we are introducing will help nine out of 10 Canadian families. It will lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. The member across the way praised the universal child care benefit, the UCCB, which was the subsidy that the previous government provided to Canadian families.

Can my colleague go into more detail about that and tell us what families in his riding are saying about the new Canada child benefit? Would he rather go back to the old system that even helped the rich but did not help poor children as much?

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, the new child care benefit does have its positive features. It would be remiss for me to say it does not.

However, our plan was universal. I think that is very important. Where our plan differs is that we prefer to give more money back to the people who earned it. We believe that them having more money in their pockets, which would allow them to spend on priorities that would benefit them, is better for the overall economy.

Instead of taking from one group and giving to another, the overall plan should be to reduce taxes, keep a balanced budget, and spend within our means. I think that goes without saying, regardless of whether it is a small business or a family. Spending within our means and allowing people to keep more money in their pockets to spend on their priorities is a good thing. We had that plan. We were moving forward. We saw growth in the economy. That is very important to know. When we have a strong economy and jobs are being created, people have income to spend and keep the economy moving.

Spending for the sake of spending on the government's side sends the wrong message. This bill has to be paid back, and at some point in the future, we will have to be pay it back.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for an excellent speech. He was talking about the fact that this budget, although it is spending a lot of money, would not create a lot of jobs. I see from the numbers in budget 2016 that we will only change the unemployment rate by .3% with this \$113 billion of spending.

Certainly, we have seen the fossil fuel sector hugely challenged. In my riding, we are very concerned about double layers of carbon taxes. Because of the difficulty with oil prices, we have seen job losses in the west and job losses in the east.

I wonder if my colleague would comment on whether there is anything in this budget that is a bright light for creating jobs.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, there is not much to create jobs. That is the biggest problem here. Although the Liberals committed during the election that the majority of their deficit spending would be on infrastructure—there is some, but there

is not much—most of their spending is on program spending, which does not help. We need to be investing. If we are going to make investments, we need to actually make investments and do what we say.

In terms of creating jobs, not lowering the small business tax rate was a mistake. It was promised during the election. It was not done. That is going to hurt small businesses, especially in Ontario. They are already being hammered left, right, and centre, so why not give them a break? Let them create jobs. Let them create wealth in their communities. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

Then there is their so-called middle-class tax cut, which I referred to in my speech. People earning under \$45,000 get absolutely zero. How is that helping those who need it the most? They just keep squeezing the people on the lower end, the people they say they want to help.

This is going completely backwards. Taking more and giving people less of their own income to spend, which they worked so hard for, sends the wrong message to Canadians who just want to do better.

• (1025)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise again in this House on behalf of the people of Chilliwack—Hope to speak to this budget.

Before I begin, I would like to add my voice, my thoughts and prayers, and those of my wife Lisa, to the people of Fort McMurray, and now northern B.C., as well, near Fort St. John, who are facing the threat of wildfire. We want to once again give our thanks to the first responders who are putting themselves in harm's way to protect property and people. Our thoughts are with them.

Contrary to what we have heard from the Liberal Party today, this budget is bad news for families, small businesses, long-term growth and prosperity, and it is bad for accountability and transparency.

All one has to do is to look at the summary of this bill. If we are being honest, this is an omnibus bill. It includes multiple changes to different pieces of legislation, something which the Liberals and the NDP railed against in the previous government. They always opposed these omnibus bills. This is 176 pages of omnibus legislation that is being changed here today.

Government Orders

It is not good news for Canadians. Again, if we look at the summary, we can see that what the Liberals are proposing to do with the budget is to eliminate the education tax credit and the textbook tax credit. This is bad news for the students in Chilliwack—Hope. We have one of the best universities in British Columbia, the University of the Fraser Valley. It received strategic investments from our Conservative government through the knowledge infrastructure program. It is a great institution and is the first choice for many students who are going to high school in my riding and want to stay near home. It is a great place to go to school. However, now it will be more expensive for families to put their kids through school. They will receive less support with the elimination of the textbook tax credit and the education tax credit.

The greatest betrayal by the Liberal Party in this budget is with respect to small businesses. The member for Sarnia—Lambton asked my colleague who just spoke about the plan for job growth in this budget. We know that governments do not create jobs. It is the small and medium-sized businesses in this country that create jobs.

What has the Liberal government done with this budget and with its broken promise to small business? It has made it harder for those small businesses, those job creators, to hire more people. It has eliminated the hiring credit for small businesses. The Liberals went from business to business and door to door, and promised Canadians they would be lowering the small business tax rate from 10.5% to 9%. They broke that promise in their first budget. What will that do? The parliamentary budget officer made it clear. He said that it will cost small businesses in my riding, in the province of British Columbia and right across the country, over \$2.2 billion over the course of this mandate. The government is taking money out of the pockets of small business owners, and we know why. We heard it during the campaign, and we heard it again from the Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism this week.

The Liberals believe that small business owners are simply tax avoiders and that they are using their small businesses to avoid paying their fair share. That is an insult to the small business owners in my riding. It is an insult to the small business owners right across this country who work so hard, day in and day out, to put food on the table for their families and to hire other people so they can do the same. They have betrayed small businesses in my riding. Quite frankly, after campaigning for 78 days and promising otherwise, they should be ashamed of that betrayal.

This budget creates more difficulty for families. The Liberals are eliminating the children's art tax credit and the children's fitness tax credit. We know that there is an issue with children needing to be more active. When we were in government, we encouraged Canadian children to be more active, by helping their families put them into sports and programs where they would work up a sweat. That tax credit encouraged families to register their kids in sports, swimming lessons, soccer, and hockey. Now that help has been taken away.

• (1030)

Regarding the arts tax credit, in my riding many families have put their children into dance lessons, piano lessons, things that enrich their lives and make a more well-rounded child. We rewarded that by

giving Canadians a little help when they put their families in those sorts of programs. Now the Liberals are taking that away.

As my colleague before me mentioned, the Liberals talked about their tax program in the campaign. The Liberal Party promised Canadians that their tax changes would be revenue neutral, and that has proven to be absolutely false. It is just \$3 billion off revenue neutral, so it is close if we think of \$3 billion as being close, but of course the cost to the Treasury, which means to taxpayers, is \$3 billion higher than the Liberal Party said.

The Liberals have raised taxes on high-income earners, which is what they decided to do. However, they said it would benefit middle-class Canadians. It benefits people with incomes between \$45,000 and \$200,000 the most. It benefits the rich, as they like to call them, the wealthy 1% the most. It does nothing for the majority of households in my riding with incomes of under \$45,000 a year, so how is that helping all Canadians? In fact, it is not. It is leaving out the most vulnerable Canadians with this tax cut. It is a shame, because that is not what the Liberals promised Canadians. That is another broken promise.

Another broken promise in the budget is the promise that the government would be accountable and transparent with its budgeting. The parliamentary budget officer once again has proved that is another broken promise. He said the Liberals were hiding information from Canadians, creating their own economic growth projections, and exaggerating job growth expectations. In fact, he said their job creation numbers, if not completely fabricated, were certainly manipulated to the tune of 40% inflation. The Liberals said they would create 100,000 jobs with the budget, and again I would say it is businesses, not government, that create jobs. However, their job projection numbers were off by 40,000, 40% just pulled out of the air.

For a time, the Liberals refused to give this House five-year financial data. They said they would be open and transparent, and in fact the parliamentary budget officer had to force them to give five-year numbers, which is the standard for all governments across multiple parties for the last decade, so they are not more transparent and open.

I want to talk about that on another issue. One of the budget items I supported was the funding for first nations education. We tried that in the last Parliament. I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. We brought forward a bill that would have provided \$1.9 billion. It would have changed aboriginal education right across the country.

Government Orders

Our bill included provisions for transparency, accountability to taxpayers, accountability to parents, and accountability to the students in first nations schools. I watched the current Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs help to defeat that bill and help to run off National Chief Shawn Atleo, because he wanted to make a difference for indigenous youth in this country.

The government will not enforce the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. It has not had the courage to bring forward a bill to repeal that act, but it is simply not enforcing first nations accountability and transparency any longer. That is a mistake, and once again, it is another broken promise about transparency and accountability.

This is bad for families, bad for taxpayers, and bad for accountability. I would encourage all members of the House to vote against it.

● (1035)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member and his family have a long history of serving the House, so there must be some corporate memory.

Let us talk about 400,000 lost manufacturing jobs during the Conservative reign or the CIBC finding that job quality sunk to its lowest level in 20 years. There are lots of jobs, but really bad ones. The member talked about revenue neutral. There were \$14 billion a year lost from government revenue due to the GST cuts, which only really benefited the high rollers who spent a lot of money.

Given that Canadians thoroughly rejected the Conservatives' poor results over a 10-year period, what would he counsel his new leader, whenever he or she is selected, to do differently in order to regain the confidence and trust of Canadians?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what we would not do. We would not promise Canadians \$10 billion in deficit spending and blow through that by billions of dollars before six months had even passed.

Yes, I do have a good corporate memory. I remember when Paul Martin balanced the budget on the backs of the provinces by cutting \$25 billion out of the health care budget. That is something that Conservatives did not do. We increased funding for health care, we cut taxes for Canadians, and we provided the conditions for the creation of 1.3 million net new jobs, 80% of them full time and over three-quarters in high-wage industries.

As for the comment about cutting the GST, we are proud to have cut the GST from 7% to 5% and that benefits low-income Canadians more than anyone else, because often they are paying no taxes. They are not paying incomes taxes, so when they spend money on groceries or a snow suit for their kids, when they put coats on the backs of their children, they are paying less every time. It has resulted in savings of thousands of dollars.

That is the record of the Conservative government: more money in the pockets of Canadian taxpayers. I am proud of that record and any new leader that we elect will be proud of it, too. We will continue to fight for lower taxes and for taxpayers.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for

recognizing my community, which is under an evacuation order as we speak. I thank him for his concerns.

The member mentioned concerns about the fitness and arts tax credits and I have received many emails from people concerned about this loss of revenue sources for families. Some families may not be able to put their kids in sports, such as hockey, rugby, or baseball. In the arts, I think of piano or guitar lessons, or just name it. Some of the budgets of these folks are so tight that now they are on the bubble and they may not be able to put their kids in sports or music.

I would like the member to comment on what the future of Canada could hold with the loss of these burgeoning athletes and musicians.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his leadership, not only in his community but in British Columbia. He is the chair of the B.C. Conservative caucus and he does a great job.

I spoke about the loss of the child fitness tax credit and the arts tax credit. Those were good benefits that Canadians really appreciated. They knew that it was going to make a difference. It was going to put some money in their pockets and help them out. That is the difference between the Conservative philosophy and the Liberal philosophy.

Liberals said that they are eliminating the universal child care benefit. That means that some children in this country will now receive no support. Conservatives believe that every child matters, no matter what family he or she is in and no matter what the financial situation of that family is. That is another part of this budget that is so disappointing.

If one wage earner in Chilliwack—Hope is a nurse and another is a teacher, they will get nothing from the Liberal government in terms of child care benefits, because they are too rich. Their children do not matter because they make too much household income. We are talking about a teacher and a nurse. Those are the types of families that are excluded from the Liberal plan. The Conservative plan was universal. This plan excludes Canadian children and that is why Conservatives cannot support it.

● (1040)

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Ottawa South.

I rise today to discuss how our government's budget would benefit rural Canada.

Government Orders

I am very fortunate to chair a strong rural caucus that is working hard to identify key issues and challenges that exist in rural Canada and lobby on behalf of those issues. Our caucus has identified three key issues that we feel are representative of rural Canada: first, digital infrastructure, whether it is cellular or broadband Internet; second, dedicated funding toward small rural communities; and third, economic investment and resources for small rural communities.

A transformation is happening in our society today that is synonymous with the transformation that happened in the late 1800s as we transitioned from the first wave of the industrial revolution to the second wave. Today we are going from the third wave to the fourth wave. Just as the transition at that time was a highly automated transition, it is as well today, where technology and automation are eliminating jobs far more quickly than creating them.

The catalyst at that time to drive entrepreneurialism was the national dream, the railroad. It connected our towns, our communities, our provinces, our country to nations across the world. It increased the level of productivity and it increased accessibility for our small entrepreneurs to be able to sell their products and services beyond their towns and villages.

We need a catalyst today that is similar to that. To me, digital infrastructure and economic development are those two catalysts. Digital infrastructure is important, whether it is providing the children of rural families with access to the Internet so that they can do their homework, or whether it is medicine being delivered through telemedicine facilities in remote regions, or once again, whether it is for our small entrepreneurs to be able to do their business beyond their front doors.

I have travelled a lot in my riding and have visited many innovative and creative individuals. They are passionate and focused on what they do but they are not necessarily all good at selling or marketing or branding themselves or dealing with finances. That is why we really need to be able to provide enterprise facilitation-type services, innovation hubs, incubation hubs, clusters to our entrepreneurs so that they can overcome the intimidation of starting their business or so they can access training and skills that they do not necessarily have, whether it is marketing, sales, or finance.

Our government is listening to individuals like Adrian Ellis and to organizations like the Eastern Ontario Regional Network or the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. We have delivered \$500 million toward the digital infrastructure that all of these organizations and individuals have been clamouring for so they are able to deliver their products and services to a market far broader than just hanging a shingle on their doors.

Our government is listening and our government is getting the job done. We are investing \$800 million into innovation centres, clusters, and incubation hubs, so that we can provide those skills and training, those facilitation services that so many of our entrepreneurs in rural areas desperately need.

We are also providing a \$70-million investment to agricultural research and innovation. We are providing innovation funds for forestry, mining, and for many other sectors that will benefit in rural

areas of our country and that will generate jobs and growth for our rural communities.

Tremendous infrastructure funding challenges exist in rural areas. The application process through the small community fund is daunting. The small community fund today is dedicated toward municipalities that have populations of 100,000 people or less.

• (1045)

In Canada, there are only 50 communities that have more than 100,000 people. There are close to 5,000 communities that have less than 100,000 people. How does a community of 1,000 people compete with a community of 100,000 people?

One of the challenges around the application process is that these communities do not have the internal resources to fill out these complex applications, and they do not have the financial resources to hire professional grant writers to be able to brand these resources.

Our government, once again, is listening to mayors, like Bernice Jenkins, when they say they are having problems putting their asset management plan together. Therefore, we are dedicating \$50 million toward the generation of asset management plans to create a level playing field for small municipalities so that they are able to fill out these funding applications and once again be able to communicate the need that they have. At the end of day, these grants are awarded based on perceived need. If one cannot brand that need, then that need will not be perceived to be as high as that of someone who can brand that need.

Another part of the small community fund is the one-third, one-third, one-third: the one-third the municipality pays, the one-third the province pays, and the one-third the federal government pays. Once again, that is very difficult for small rural communities that have had highways downloaded on to them, like the mayor of Hastings Highlands, Vivian Bloom. That community has a piece of Highway 62, but the community had to reject the funding that it had received under the small community fund because it could not afford paying the one-third.

Our government, under this budget, will be relaxing that criteria. Once again, it will be dependent upon the financial situation of a municipality and the need to get the project done. Our government is going to be able to assist them in providing a greater portion of that funding.

Also, there is the problem for most communities of being shovel ready, like Deseronto, when Mayor Norm Clark needed to do a \$7 million expansion to the water plant. The community needed to generate a \$700,000 report just to be shovel ready. That was more than its whole budget. Once again, our government, in this budget, is relaxing that requirement.

There are so many aspects of this budget that will benefit rural Canada, such as the Canada child benefit, the middle-class tax cut, and the increase in the guaranteed income supplement.

Government Orders

My riding has one of the highest child poverty rates in the province, the second highest food insecurity rate in the province, and one of the highest unemployment rates. We need to put more money in the pockets of those who need it the most. What happens when we do that? They spend it in our local communities, which benefits our small businesses, which helps to create jobs, which helps to create growth.

If we do not trust that Canadians have the resourcefulness and are hard-working enough to invest in them, to give them the assurance that we trust them to invest in them, then who is going to? If the Government of Canada does not believe in Canadians, then who is going to believe in Canadians?

Now is the time to invest in Canada. The interest rates are low, and the debt-to-GDP rate is low. We need to invest in Canadians today to create the future jobs that will grow our communities and provide that income level to support our families.

• (1050)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very supportive of the rural Internet funding and the infrastructure funding that was put toward that, as well as research and innovation. However, as the co-chair for the parliamentary rail caucus, I was disappointed with the budget when I saw that the high-performance rail from the southwest Ontario corridor to Quebec, which is such a priority and would have been such a help in terms of addressing climate change, was not even funded. There was only money for a study.

I wonder if the member could comment on why that was left out.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Mr. Speaker, like the member, I agree on the importance of rail.

Once again, do we just throw money out there and hope that it creates this field of dreams? No, we have to do the reports, and we have to bring evidence and data to support the investment.

We are a growth agenda government. If we do not have the data and cannot quantify the growth that will result from the investment, then the investment is not worth making. Any business would do the same thing.

Our government is putting money into the study of exactly what we need to have in place, and the level of investment that is really going to bring about the change that is necessary to increase rail travel, to move people quicker from one part of the country to another, so that we can increase productivity and growth in our economy.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a former mayor, I really appreciate a lot of the comments the member has made this morning about the needs. Certainly, we need a different formula in municipalities. That one-third, one-third, one-third formula was really difficult for small communities. Those communities also need money up front so they can actually be shovel ready with their projects. A lot of them cannot afford the cost of engineering studies to be shovel ready.

I also think we need to expand our basic definition of infrastructure. Traditionally, it has always been sewer, water, roads, and storm drains. I think we need to be adding dark fibre high-speed Internet as a basic piece of infrastructure in all our communities

moving forward. It is really important, particularly to rural areas. Also, we need to move to multi-year funding so they can actually do some planning.

I would be interested in the member's thoughts on adding multi-year funding and dark fibre to his list of priorities.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more. As part of the funding formula, we really need to look at whenever there is an infrastructure project to be done, when a road is being dug up for example, at least the conduit for fibre should be laid when that road is being done.

The member made a great point. We need that long-term funding. That is why there is \$500 million over five years. That does give the sustained funding. Do we need more? Absolutely. I could not agree more. I think our government recognizes that.

This would be the largest government investment made in broadband Internet. Moving forward, we would continue to make those investments because we recognize that the growth is there. If we invest, this technology is the catalyst. If we are going to compete in this highly technological, highly globalized competitive world, we need to have the infrastructure in place that is going to create a level playing field for everyone to benefit and for everyone to bring their products and services.

Canadians are so innovative and creative. We just need to give them the tools to allow that entrepreneurial spirit that exists in all of us to explode, just as it did back in the late 1800s when all of our towns and cities boomed because of the railroad.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through you, I wish a good morning to my colleagues on all sides of the House.

This is a continuing and foundational debate for the country. I have always believed that budgets are about choices, and they really do reflect how a government lends shape to its specific priorities.

I have heard feedback from hundreds of constituents about this budget, and most aptly it has been described as a people's budget. It is a people's budget that addresses the real needs of working Canadians in the here and now dealing with the challenges in the Canadian economy and the challenges in Canadians' daily lives. At the same time, I describe this budget as an agenda for growth. Those are big words: agenda for growth.

What it really means is that over the last decade or so, we have seen a flat-lining in terms of the growth in the Canadian economy, and that is as a result of the deliberate choices made by a previous government. All of us respect the fact that the previous government had the right to do so, but we would not find unanimity or agreement here in terms of how that government pursued some of those priorities. For that matter, I do not think we would find agreement on its priorities among its members themselves.

The very first thing we did in order to help everyday Canadians was to cut their taxes. The first act brought here by our government, the Prime Minister, our caucus, was to cut individual personal income taxes, which kicked in on January 1, 2016. It is important to remind Canadians of that because we know from economists that one of the most impactful measures that can be brought to bear in a budget is to cut personal income taxes and thereby free up more income for spending, or saving, or investing. We made that deliberate choice on the basis of very sound economic evidence.

The second thing we did that is foundational in this budget is we invested in our families. We invested through the Canada child benefit. Yes, we did eliminate a number of small tax measures that were being used, in our view, by the previous government to a certain extent as trinkets. Instead, we actually enhanced the Canada child benefit for working families in a dramatic fashion. Nine out of ten Canadian families are getting increases in benefits for their kids. The interesting thing about those benefits is that they are now tax-free. That is important because again, we wanted to put support into the hands of our everyday middle-class Canadian families, while at the same time working to lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty.

Poverty, as we would all agree, is a scourge. One of the values that informs our government, our party, is the powerful but simple notion that we leave no one behind, that every child has the same opportunity to be able to succeed. Yes, play by the rules, and yes, work hard, but that is hard to do when one is living in and surrounded by poverty. That is why the Canada child benefit is such a powerful contribution to helping our families and their children move forward.

Given the fact that the most important and powerful investment a nation can make is in learning, we invested heavily in post-secondary education. We have made it more affordable. We have changed the Canada student loan program. We have increased the grants. We have allowed students who are graduating from college and university with debt to have a threshold of income of \$25,000 a year before they have to begin paying back their Canada student loan. That is going to help.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continuing this debate after question period, and I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

•(1055)

[*Translation*]

SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Scottish National Party won the election yesterday. As First Minister Nicola Sturgeon pointed out, it was a historic victory.

This third consecutive win for the Scottish National Party is a first in the history of the Scottish Parliament.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to extend our heartfelt congratulations to them. We salute our Scottish friends, especially those who support the party's plans for independence.

Statements by Members

As long as London has control over the legislation and policies that apply to Scotland, that nation will remain under the thumb of another nation. What could be more noble for a people than to have control over their own legislation and actions, live in a way that reflects their own values, have control over their own plans, and live out their own dreams? Now that is liberty.

Millions of people in Quebec also dream of such liberty, and are working hard to make it a reality.

[*Member spoke in Scots.*]

[*Translation*]

Best wishes to my Scottish friends, and long live a free Scotland.

* * *

•(1100)

FÉLIX BERTRAND

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a young man from Saint-André-Avellin. Félix Bertrand, who is 13, is a freestyle skiing champion who lives in the beautiful riding of Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

Félix won more than a dozen medals this year and two gold medals at the Canadian championships. He ended his season as the top freestyle skier in Quebec.

Félix is back in his hometown of Saint-André-Avellin, where he received the grand prize for male athlete of the year at the Fédération québécoise du ski acrobatique gala. Just yesterday, he received confirmation that he has been chosen to be on the Quebec team. He is the youngest athlete in history to achieve such a feat.

Félix is a proud ambassador for my riding and the Olympic sport. Again, my congratulations and good luck in the future.

* * *

LAVAL UNIVERSITY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the 350th anniversary of Laval University. An offshoot of the Séminaire de Québec, Laval University was the first French-language university in America. With its culture of rigour, spirit of innovation and quest for excellence, it has educated and granted degrees to more than 280,000 people over the years.

Open to the world and engaged in its community, Laval University's vision is inspiring and promising: it aspires to be one of the best universities in the world and at the same time one of the main standard-bearers for the preservation of the French fact in America.

I hope that on this important anniversary the Liberal government will confirm that it will help establish the Institut nordique du Québec. Completely forgotten in the last budget, this project led by Laval University is creating a group that brings together Quebec expertise in the major sectors of nordic and Arctic research.

Statements by Members

[English]

HON. CAIRINE WILSON

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, I attended a Parks Canada plaque unveiling ceremony at an Orléans secondary school, commemorating the historical significance of the school's namesake, the Hon. Cairine Wilson, Canada's first female senator.

Attendees were led by the students of the high school, under Principal Tom Macartney, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada chair, Dr. Richard M. Alway, and most notably, Senator Cairine Wilson's family, including Cairine Wilson and Janet Davies.

Senator Wilson greatly contributed to the advancement of women in the public sphere. She was also a strong and passionate voice for the liberalization of immigration laws and the admission of refugees to Canada.

Her work as a senator focused on promoting equal opportunities for women and their right to independence, a legacy that all Canadians can benefit from today. She was a remarkable Canadian, for a remarkable country.

* * *

[Translation]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the minister announced that Canada is finally going to ratify the United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. That is good news.

However, we need to take real action. Too often Canada's policy has allowed and still allows torture and mistreatment. Who can forget how Maher Arar was tortured because of false information provided by Canadian officials? Think about Omar Khadr, who was a prisoner in Guantanamo, where Canadian officials participated in his interrogation, knowing that he was sleep deprived, without giving him access to a lawyer.

The Supreme Court itself said that these measures offended “the most basic Canadian standards about the treatment of detained youth suspects” and that they constituted “a clear violation of Canada's international human rights obligations—”

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Pontiac.

* * *

RÉJEAN LAFRENIÈRE

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to offer my condolences to the family of my assistant, Françoise Lafrenière, whose father, Réjean Lafrenière, recently passed away.

Réjean was passionate about politics. He was the mayor of the municipality of Lac-Sainte-Marie for 22 years, and then served as the warden of the RCM of Vallée-de-la-Gatineau for six years. He went on to represent the Liberal Party in the Quebec National Assembly as the member for Gatineau from 1989 to 2007.

Réjean was heavily involved in the Outaouais and has left his mark on the region. He will be fondly remembered by everyone who had the privilege of working with him. It was an honour and a privilege to have known him. I will always remember how generous he was in giving me advice at the beginning of my political career.

Very few people understand the spirit of Vallée-de-la-Gatineau and the soul of its people like Réjean did.

I offer my sincere condolences to his entire family.

* * *

● (1105)

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

Springtime is here; our farmers are in their fields
Assessing the moisture, gauging their yields.
When rain is sparse and times are tough
And the price of hay is especially rough,
As Conservatives we understand
It takes hard work to till the land.

Alberta NDP passed a law for working on prairie farms:
More expensive food—don't care who it harms.
They said, “John dear, we want your food
But only feed your cows when we're in the mood;
No overtime or you'll pay the price”.
Beef and pork will cost more than twice

We're standing up for farmers, feeding cows 'till nine.
We're standing up for farmers, working overtime.
You eat their beef, you sit on leather,
Your feet are shod in stormy weather.
Without their food, life would be grim
Unless you plan to be awfully thin

Family farms are getting fewer.
Once they're gone, we're in deep manure.
Don't egg me on, the yolk's on you.
If farmers leave, what will we do?
Bottom line—You want to eat?
Support our farmers—Buy their wheat.

* * *

AL SAIKALI

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 2, 2016, Ottawa lost a legendary community builder. Al Saikali, the founder of Al's Steakhouse, passed away at the age of 87.

The oldest of three children, he was born Halim Saikali in the Beqaa Valley in central Lebanon. He worked as a labourer and a barber before moving to Canada in 1950.

Once in Ottawa, he worked day and night at multiple dishwashing jobs, including at the Château Laurier earning \$12 a week. He saved every penny.

Two years later, he bought the Riverside Tea Room and married his long-time sweetheart, Jeannette. They were blessed with four children: Barbara, Jane, Gloria, and Sammy, 10 grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

Statements by Members

He opened Ottawa's iconic Al's Steakhouse in 1967. It remains an Ottawa institution, attracting locals and celebrities alike.

The memory of this wonderful, caring man lives on with his family, his famous local restaurant, and the community he loved so much.

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KANATA NORTH COMMUNITY RECOGNITION AWARDS

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, I had the honour of attending the Kanata North Community Recognition Awards, where some of Kanata's exceptional volunteers were honoured.

Citizen of the Year went to Reem Tarek, and nominees were Cathy Briggs, Jen Muckler Nicoletta, Jez Blomqvist, Beata Myhill, Lianne Zhou, and Bev Popyk.

Senior Citizen of the Year was Shirley Yakabuski-Milligan, and nominees were Kay Gibbons, Mutah Ghamian, Pei Zhen Ma, Bing Zhang, and Jim Shearon.

Youth Citizen of the Year was Jacob Masciotra, and nominees were Shreya, Sia, and Vansh Anand.

Organization of the Year was the Arcadia Community Association, led by Jessica Cunha and Daniel Kircherham, and nominees were the Matthew House Furniture Bank and the Kanata Stocking Project.

Also a Special Community Award winner was Madame Nathalie Guay.

I am so honoured to serve the people of Kanata—Carleton, and I am so very proud of all our community volunteers.

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[*Translation*]

LOTBINIÈRE CAREGIVERS' ASSOCIATION

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank a group of people who make a priceless contribution to the lives of loved ones who are ill or disabled through the Regroupement des personnes aidantes de Lotbinière, which has been active in the RCM of Lotbinière's 18 municipalities for over 25 years.

Thanks to the Regroupement's support, family caregivers are better equipped to cope with day-to-day challenges, such as isolation, worry, and physical and mental fatigue.

The Regroupement's 225 volunteers are, above all, deeply compassionate and extraordinarily generous people who work every day to make life better for people with unique needs so they can continue to live with dignity.

In closing, I would like to thank the Regroupement des personnes aidantes de Lotbinière for its exceptional work and its wonderful message of hope and love in our community.

● (1110)

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far too many families are suffering through a loss of contact between parents and children due to cross-border family disputes.

May 25 will mark International Missing Children's Day. I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our government's commitment to addressing international child abduction.

Our consular officials are currently providing support to almost 300 families. Canada has taken a leadership role to strengthen the Hague convention on international child abduction.

This week, Canadian officials are working hard at the Fourth Malta Conference on Cross-Frontier Child Protection and Family Law to improve protection for the rights of children and their parents.

Children are often victimized by unfortunate, and sometimes illegal, behaviour. Governments across the world need to continue to work together to defend the interests of these helpless children.

I call upon my colleagues to support our officials' efforts in this significant matter.

* * *

FORT MCMURRAY FIRE

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stand with all my colleagues in this House in support of everyone affected by the tragic forest fires in Fort McMurray and in thanks to our first responders who have worked so courageously to keep our fellow Canadians safe.

As many have noted so eloquently, Fort McMurray really is a community that has welcomed all Canadians.

With the collapse of the cod fishery in the nineties, many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians headed west to work in the oil and gas industry. When they arrived, they were welcomed with open arms in the Fort Mac area. This is a testament to the spirit of those in the community and of all Albertans.

I want to ensure the fine residents of Fort McMurray that they have the support of all Canadians at this difficult time, especially their colleagues and family on the Rock.

I want to encourage all Canadians to donate as much as they can, when they can, to the Red Cross to help our comrades through this horrific time.

* * *

CENTRAL OKANAGAN ROTARY FOOD DRIVE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well known for their willingness to give their time to help out in local communities—this is as true in my riding as it is in any other.

Statements by Members

Today, I would like to recognize the hard work and dedication of a number of my constituents who helped to organize the Central Okanagan Rotary food drive for the Rotarians at Work Day, on April 30.

I am very proud to inform the House that this food drive collected more than 12,000 pounds of food to support local families. This is a fantastic example of how Canadians from different organizations can come together and make a real difference in our communities.

In particular, I want to recognize the Central Okanagan Community Food Bank, the Westside Community Food Bank, the Rotary Clubs of the Central Okanagan, Investors Group of West Kelowna, the West Kelowna Youth Ambassadors program, Save on Foods, and everyone else who came together to help make this a reality.

* * *

SCIENCE ODYSSEY

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House today to invite all members and the public to participate in Science Odyssey, a 10-day celebration of Canadian achievement in science and technology.

Today, the Minister of Science is in Vancouver to launch this great event, which will open the doors of labs, museums, research facilities, and science centres right across the country.

I invite all parliamentarians to join with the public and participate, whether it is observing the transition of planet Mercury on space day, or encouraging young women's and girls' participation in STEM disciplines on coding day.

I encourage all members to engage in events in their home ridings.

Seeing science up close helps to foster a culture of innovation and to inspire young Canadians to pursue science-related careers. It also helps build appreciation for the role of good research in decision-making.

This is the time for each and every one of us to unleash our curiosity and join the Odyssey.

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TRANSPORTATION OF PROPANE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are at the beginning of the tourist season, but not all are rejoicing. Many members of North Island—Powell River depend on propane, which is critical for the marinas, lodges, guides, and many residents. Transport Canada has decided to suspend the delivery of propane by barge to communities off the northern part of my riding. The government does not seem to understand the realities of rural coastal communities.

Most of these locations are accessible only by boat and float plane. Many have no roads at all, and the local topography simply does not allow for refuelling to be conducted by truck. Propane is the lifeline for remote communities in my riding. It is their power supply and, in many cases, their means to making a living.

This move is effectively cutting off electricity to communities and businesses in the region. I wish to express my constituents' need for a fair and expedient resolution to this matter.

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●(1115)

WAR HEROES FROM CANADA

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago, Canadian pilots played an extraordinary role in the air war over the Western Front. Consider this: there were 171 Canadian flying aces. Together, these pilots downed a total of 2,099 enemy aircraft. Twenty-four Canadian aces had over 20 victories apiece, third among all the nations of the world. Among the best of the best, of the dozen pilots of all nations with more than 50 victories a piece, four were Canadians.

This parade of heroes should have produced a litany of household names, but other than Billy Bishop, who today is not forgotten? For example, how many Canadians know that Manfred von Richthofen, Germany's Red Baron, the ace of aces, was shot down by Canadian pilot Roy Brown in April 1918? The Roy Brown Society has been established to commemorate this heroic Canadian. The society hopes to lead a pilgrimage to the site of this most famous aerial dogfight in history on the 100th anniversary of its occurrence in 1918.

In the meantime, let us all remember all of our great heroes of the air war over the Western Front.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to draw attention to Mental Health Week, which is this week, May 2 to 6.

This serves as an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of our mental health. Every year, one in five people in Canada suffers from mental illness. This year's theme, "Get Loud", invites us to stand up and speak out against the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and to talk about it more in order to educate the people around us.

We all know someone who is struggling with mental illness. By "getting loud", we will really be able to reduce the stigma that continues to surround mental illness in Canada.

Get loud, whether it is for a colleague, a family member, or yourself.

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

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's trip to Washington was an even bigger abuse of taxpayers' money than we thought. The size of the delegation is a huge reason for the ballooning costs. He brought 44 people with him. Not only did this include everyone in his family, he also brought anyone who was even remotely Liberal, all on the taxpayers' dime. In what universe is this entitled behaviour considered ethical?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we recognize that this was the first official visit to the United States by a Canadian prime minister since 1997. In fact, the relationship between Canada and the United States is our most important bilateral relationship. We have the longest, most peaceful, and mutually beneficial relationship of any two countries since the birth of these two nations. The Prime Minister discussed the revitalization of the Canada-U.S. relationship and the importance of a closer relationship between Canada and the United States.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims this trip was to promote important Canada-U.S. ties, yet he used the taxpayer to bring family members who had no official business there whatsoever. The Prime Minister's celebrity-sized entourage apparently did not have room for ministers with actual responsibilities. With so many important bilateral issues at stake, can the Prime Minister explain why he had room for his in-laws but not the Minister of Natural Resources?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, former Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney said that the most important foreign policy priority for a Canadian prime minister was to have a personal relationship with the president of the United States. It would appear that our Prime Minister has heeded that advice. He has built a strong relationship with President Obama. Perhaps if the immediate former Conservative prime minister had done the same, he would have been able to get projects like Keystone XL approved.

● (1120)

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess his in-laws have more experience on some files than his actual ministers in his cabinet.

[Translation]

We are starting to see a troubling trend. It began with nannies paid for with taxpayers' money and photo ops paid for with taxpayers' money, and now the Prime Minister seems to be asking Canadians to foot the bill for his family vacations, claiming that they are business trips.

The Prime Minister made sure there was enough room on the trip for party members, but he excluded certain ministers with key portfolios. Apparently, he feels it is more important to reward his party hacks than to promote Canada's interests.

What member would like to stand up and defend this unethical behaviour?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a way, it is strange to hear the Conservatives attacking family values. It is very important for the Prime Minister and his family to be together, and it is also important to recognize the significance of Canada-U.S. relations. We will continue to protect our relationship with the United States.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. Before proceeding to the next speaker, I want to remind the members in the hall that there is a process, and it usually goes through the Speaker. Therefore, if members would refrain from talking while another person is speaking, I would certainly appreciate that.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not just all of these vanity trips, it is the Liberals' unbelievable sense of entitlement. Let us be honest: The Prime Minister has never actually needed to work a day in his life, yet he feels it is completely acceptable to take money from hard-working moms and dads and get special privileges. How can he justify Canadian families being forced to pay \$100,000 a year for his nannies while Canadian families have to pay for their own child care?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all families of prime ministers, a small number of staff provide assistance. Given the nature of the Prime Minister's responsibilities, and his young family, he employs two household employees who, in addition to performing other duties around the house, act as secondary caregivers to the three children. It should come as no surprise that the Prime Minister has a different family situation with three young children than the previous prime minister's family did.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister was campaigning, he said that millionaire families like his did not need taxpayer-funded child care, but as soon as he was elected, he stripped Canadian families of the universal child care benefit and gave himself a \$100,000-a-year child care benefit.

Why is the Liberal Prime Minister so focused on getting benefits for himself and his family and his Liberal buddies?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the hon. member brought up the issue of child benefits. The Canada child benefit, which we introduced in our budget, will help the Canadian families who need the help the most. A family making \$40,000 a year in Canada, with two kids, would be \$4,000 better off under our Canada child benefit. A single parent making \$30,000 a year will be over \$6,000 better off than under the former Conservative government. A family making \$90,000 a year with two kids would be \$2,500 better off than under the former government.

We are—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

*Oral Questions***CANADA POST**

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first the Prime Minister promised to restore home mail delivery, then the Prime Minister bizarrely accused the NDP of fabricating the quote. The problem for him is that we actually have it on tape.

Now we learn that one of the four people appointed to the government's new task force sits on the board of Shoppers Drug Mart, a company with direct financial interests in postal services. There is a term for this and one the Liberals are quite familiar with, and it is conflict of interest.

Will the minister agree to replace the member on her hand-picked task force for Canada Post?

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is as simple as this. It was a promise made and a promise kept. Our party committed during the campaign to undertake a review to ensure that Canadians receive quality postal services at a reasonable price, and yesterday we did just that. The four-person independent task force will prepare a discussion paper that will present viable options for Canada Post services.

Canadians are at the centre of the decisions we make. I encourage all members to get involved in this process.

• (1125)

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only review that is needed is of the tape of the Prime Minister promising to restore home mail delivery.

[*Translation*]

Summer is just around the corner, but we cannot help but notice that the Prime Minister's sunny ways have gone out the window.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister said, "We are committed to restoring home mail delivery. People expect a certain level of service and we are going to deliver it."

Once he took office, all of that changed, and now everything is on the table. In other words, we can say goodbye to home mail delivery.

Is the Prime Minister not ashamed of misleading Canadians and breaking an election promise?

[*English*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is this government's job to ensure that we have an open and transparent and independent review to ensure that Canadians are receiving the services they need from Canada Post at a reasonable price.

The four-person independent task force will prepare a discussion paper and present all of the viable options for Canada Post. Following that, a parliamentary committee will engage with Canadians from coast to coast on this important question and will report back by the end of the year.

This is an important review, and it will be one that we hope all members of the House and all Canadians will be proud to take part in.

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, a Statistics Canada study showed that, over the past 30 years, it has become much more difficult for Canadians to move up the income ladder. The rich stay rich and the poor stay poor. That is the track record of the successive Liberal and Conservative governments. Even this Liberal budget does nothing to address this inequality.

When will the Liberals reverse that trend and actually do something about the growing inequality in our country?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, income inequality is a problem here in Canada and elsewhere. Our government's priority is to help the middle class and families that need it.

For example, our budget includes the Canada child tax benefit, which will really help Canadian families in need. We are going to continue to do that.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, their tax changes only benefit the wealthiest of Canadians. They also broke their promise on closing the stock option loophole, which benefits the wealthiest of CEOs.

The Liberals seem to hope that if they talk about inequality, people will be distracted from the fact that they are not actually doing anything about inequality. Therefore, with the new Stats Canada report showing us that income inequality is on the rise, will the Liberals now take concrete action to deal with this growing crisis and will they close the stock option loophole for the wealthiest of Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance are critical issues.

With regard to the Panama papers, I asked employees in my department to obtain the list of Canadian taxpayers, and I am pleased to inform the House that that information is now in the agency's hands. This is a worldwide issue and Canada is working with the international community.

Oral Questions

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Anna Gainey is the president of the Liberal Party. She is not a parliamentarian. She is not a cabinet minister. She is not even a diplomat. She does not have a thing to do with the business of the government, or at least she is not supposed to. Therefore, why did the Prime Minister think it appropriate to give special access in Washington to Liberal insiders, like Ms. Gainey?

• (1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I may just emphasize how important this was. This was in fact the first official visit to the United States of a Canadian Prime Minister since 1997. If we look at what was actually accomplished, the Canadian delegation engaged our American counterparts on many files, including climate change, environment and energy, international security, defence co-operation, the global coalition against ISIL, border co-operation, and trade and commercial relationships. There was a lot of good work done on behalf of all Canadians.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal family vacation gets a lot better. Stephen Bronfman is the top bagman for the Liberal Party. His job is to raise money for Liberal partisan politics, as long as it remains separate from the business of the government. However, the Prime Minister saw nothing inappropriate about inviting Bronfman down to Washington for cocktails and canapés at the White House.

Can anyone on that side of the House explain what possible government business the chief fundraiser for the Liberal Party had in Washington?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suggest the member realize he should get on focus with what Canadians want. They recognize that there is a need for an important relationship to be established between the United States and Canada. This is a Prime Minister that is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please.

Now that it is quiet we can continue.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has recognized the importance of the bilateral relationship between Canada and the United States and has made great strides in making a difference in improving that bilateral relationship.

The Conservatives should actually be applauding the government for its actions. Within six months we have been able to accomplish so much.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Minister of International Trade does not have a monopoly on questionable trips.

Yesterday we learned that when the Prime Minister goes to the White House, he brings along Liberal Party employees, his in-laws, and his nanny.

Can this government, which claims to be obsessed with transparency, explain to Canadians why it was necessary to bring 44 people to Washington and what their official roles were?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to go back to the idea that the Conservatives are really out of queue with regard to the benefits of this particular trip.

At the end of the day, we need to recognize the importance of having a strong, healthy relationship with our neighbours to the south. This is something our government takes very seriously and is something where we have seen a great deal of co-operation between the different ministries and what is taking place in Ottawa. The government is making a genuine effort to try to get a more enriched middle class by looking at broadening the relationship between Canada and the United States.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, out of 36 million Canadians, only the members opposite think this extravagance is normal. To mere mortals, it makes no sense to bring Liberal Party employees on an official trip. They have nothing to do with the administration of government.

Can the government explain to Canadians what official role the Liberal Party's chief revenue officer, Stephen Bronfman, played within the Canadian delegation?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me emphasize the benefits of that particular trip. The Canadian delegation engaged our American counterparts on many different files, whether it was dealing with the issue of climate change, environment and energy, international security, defence co-operation, the global coalition against ISIL, border co-operation, or trade and commercial relations.

This was an important trip. Canadians realize that. The only ones who do not seem to realize the benefits are the members of the Conservative Party, and that is most unfortunate.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we get the feeling that some members across the way are feeling uneasy today. They must be wondering what they did wrong not to get invited to go to Washington. In addition to the chief revenue officer, the Liberal Party's national president, Anna Gainey, was also part of the delegation. A political party president has no role in the administration of government.

How can the Liberals say that it was appropriate to bring the president of the Liberal Party of Canada to Washington?

Oral Questions

•(1135)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I request the opposition to remain focused on what is really important, and to recognize that this was in fact the first official visit to the United States by a Canadian Prime Minister since 1997.

The relationship between Canada and the United States is our most important bilateral relationship. We have the longest, most peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship of any two countries since the birth of the nation state.

The Prime Minister discussed the revitalization of the Canada-U.S. relationship, and the importance of a closer partnership between Canada—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we continue, I would like to remind hon. members that if you are having a very important discussion when someone has the floor, perhaps you could continue that discussion outside the chamber or whisper instead of speaking so loudly.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like them to listen to the question. We are having a great deal of difficulty getting answers from the government this morning, just like all the other mornings. The reason is quite simple: there is no good answer. We will give them another chance. We know what the prime minister does when he is on an official trip. However, what were the president of the Liberal Party of Canada, the chief revenue officer, and the Prime Minister's in-laws doing during this trip?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not my fault that the member does not like the answer per se. I believe Canadians should be first of mind, and at the end of day I believe that they recognize the value of that particular trip.

The Canadian delegation engaged our American counterparts on many different files. As I indicated, that included climate change, environment and energy, international security, defence co-operation, the global coalition against ISIL, border co-operation, and trade and—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have good reason to be frustrated with the KPMG and Canada Revenue Agency affair. Canadians have just finished paying their fair share of taxes, and they expect everyone to do so.

First KPMG helps millionaires hide their money in the Isle of Man. Then the agency offers them amnesty after they are caught.

Enough is enough. We need a thorough review to get to the bottom of things.

Will the Liberals stop their cover-up and stop protecting KPMG?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, enough is enough. Middle-class Canadians pay their taxes, but some wealthy individuals avoid paying their fair share. That is not acceptable and it must change.

Our government is committed to fighting tax evasion and tax avoidance. We have given the agency a record budget of \$444 million so that it can work on this file.

I will have the privilege of presenting our government's commitments to my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Finance on May 19. I would like to reassure all Canadians that no one is immune from—

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to defend sweetheart deals for multi-millionaires caught using offshore tax havens. Yesterday the Prime Minister refused, again, to answer whether these tax evaders and their KPMG scam artists will face criminal charges.

We must restore faith in the fairness of our tax system and send a message that special treatment for the wealthy and well-connected will not be allowed to stand.

Will the government bring criminal charges against all those involved in this tax evasion scandal?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agency is currently investigating the taxpayers identified in the KPMG schemes. The massive investment in our latest budget will help stop the organizations that create such schemes for the rich and that promote them.

I repeat that I have asked officials in my department to obtain the list of Canadian taxpayers. I am pleased to inform the House that the agency is now in possession of this information.

* * *

•(1140)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has cut \$3.7 billion from the defence budget. The Liberals have put ongoing projects on hold, including the procurement of offshore patrol ships and Cyclone helicopters.

Will the minister take advantage of his visits to Montreal and Valcartier to explain to our military personnel why the Liberals made these cuts, which are putting the safety of Canadians and the lives of our military personnel in danger?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the member's question is absolutely incorrect.

The deferment of funds was entirely due to the inability of the previous government to match fiscal cycles with procurement cycles. As a consequence, the money that the member references has actually been pushed off to future years and available to equip the men and women in uniform in the manner that they need to be, unlike the previous government.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence that our Conservative government acquired C-17 Globemasters, Cyclones, Hercules, Chinooks, and Leopards. The Conservatives purchased a lot of equipment for our men and women in uniform.

My question is simple. Will the minister, who is currently in Valcartier and will be going to Montreal this afternoon, use this opportunity to explain to our military personnel why the Liberals cut \$3.7 billion allocated for equipment, a decision that is now putting their safety and their lives in danger?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only explanation here that needs to be given seems to be to the Conservative Party, because the military understands that in order to be able to have the equipment that they need, the fiscal cycle and the procurement cycle need to match.

This has been an ongoing problem under the previous government. We continue to work on this so that when we have procurements that need to be funded, they will be funded at the appropriate time. That is exactly what the budget says.

I regret that the hon. member does not seem to be able to understand that matter.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the regime that leads Iran exports terror, supports terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, imprisons, tortures and executes their own people and others. This regime does not even have the decency to return the remains of Canadian citizen, Zahra Kazemi.

If the Minister of Foreign Affairs is not willing to stand up to a regime like this, then what does he stand for?

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I regret the tone of the question.

Having said that, the world needs more Canada, and Canada is better off with increasing engagement in the world. This is a harder choice than the previous government's choice. That means if we

want to be effective in promoting human rights, including in Iran, we need to engage with our allies with our eyes wide open.

Our allies are re-engaging with Iran, and I do not know why the Conservatives want us to stand alone on the sidelines. What we are doing is better for Canadians, is better for our allies, and is better for the people of Iran.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary seems to think that we need an ambassador in Iran just to talk to the Iranians. Yet, when it comes to talking about human rights, the Liberals have killed the role of an ambassador responsible specifically for that, the role of the ambassador for religious freedom.

Iranian people need the work of the office of religious freedom now more than ever. Why are the Liberals opening an embassy in Iran where Canadian diplomats may well be at risk, while closing an office that actually had the capacity to address vital human rights issues?

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because of our commitment to human rights that we are engaging more effectively in the world. The promotion and protection of human rights, including freedom of religion, is very important for our government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, when he was in Burma recently, announced a \$44-million investment for the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights, including ethnic minorities.

We are continuing our important effort in promoting human rights, including freedom of religion, domestically and abroad.

* * *

● (1145)

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government will shut down the Comox marine communications and traffic services centre on May 10. However, the fisheries committee heard alarming testimony demonstrating real concerns for safety, and the B.C. Minister of State for Emergency Preparedness seems to agree. She wrote to the fisheries minister sharing her concerns on closing the Comox centre, because it is critical to B.C. emergency preparedness plans.

Will the minister listen to his B.C. colleague, to witness testimony, and to concerned parliamentarians and keep the Comox centre open?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans has recognized that marine safety remains a top priority, even with the consolidation of Comox.

I am in receipt of the letter that the member referenced, and I would like to quote from it. The Minister of State for Emergency Preparedness said:

The Province values the cooperative and beneficial relationship we have with the Canadian Coast Guard and its staff who work hard to keep our residents and waterways safe.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, Regina's Evraz steel mill announced more layoffs. Today, Statistics Canada reported that the number of unemployed workers in Saskatchewan has exploded by 49% in the last year. Yet, when the government had a chance to do something in the budget, it chose not to help. The Liberals excluded Regina and southern Saskatchewan from extended EI benefits. Why are the Liberals turning a blind eye to workers and families in our community?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously we are concerned about the EI rate. We are concerned about the EI rate in southern Saskatchewan and indeed all those 12 regions that we have already taken action for.

Today's numbers have been released. They reflect the sharp sustained downward trend in commodity prices. Our minister is looking at those numbers now and working with her officials as we speak.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board issued an interim directive on the administration of the Access to Information Act. This directive delivers on key commitments to make government more open and transparent. Would the President of the Treasury Board please explain the directive, and tell the House how this will help open up government and improve access to information right away?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Newmarket—Aurora for his work on open government.

This directive sends a strong message across federal institutions that government information belongs to the people we serve and should be open by default. It also directs federal officials to waive all fees for access to information, apart from the \$5 filing fee, and to release information in more user-friendly formats, such as Excel spreadsheets, whenever possible.

This is an important step for the Government of Canada. We are taking this step because we are committed to revitalizing and strengthening access to information.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, good palliative care encompasses hospice and home care, end-of-life care, and psychological care. Studies have shown that where good palliative care exists, 95% of people choose to live as well as they can for as long as they can. Sadly, these services are not all paid for by government, and so for many places in our country, this choice is not available.

In light of the assisted-suicide legislation, when will the Minister of Health follow through on her promise of \$3 billion to make palliative care a covered service?

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know there is more to do to provide Canadians end-of-life care. Canadians have told us they want to stay independent and receive care at home, including at the end of their lives.

As part of the new health accord, the government has committed to provide \$3 billion over the next four years to improve home care, including palliative care. In collaboration with the provinces and territories, we will move forward on shared health priorities, including examining ways to integrate and expand access to palliative care at home.

● (1150)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will expect to see palliative care mentioned in Bill C-14.

The Minister of Health said her priority was palliative care for \$3 billion. However, she is spending her time and government resources right now on legalizing marijuana.

Is marijuana a bigger priority for our aging population than palliative care? Is it worthy of her attention now, or is her palliative care initiative going to pot?

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians have a good, peaceful, and dignified life until the very end. For that purpose, we will make sure that Canadians have access to the palliative care services that they need. We will do so with the participation of our colleagues and the provinces and territories. This is something we look forward to talking about with our colleagues on the other side in the future.

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MARIJUANA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, due to the legal uncertainty created by the Liberal promise to legalize marijuana, grow ops are sprouting up in my riding. This is causing significant health concerns, especially for our children.

Could the minister explain exactly how the Liberals plan to keep this product out of the hands of children when it could be available on every street corner?

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear that we intend to introduce a comprehensive and responsible framework of regulation for the strict control of marijuana in its production, its distribution, and its consumption.

Our intent in these regulations will be to keep it away from children, to prevent organized crime from continuing to profit from it, to make our communities safe, and to assure the health of all Canadians. To that end, we will shortly be announcing a task force, which will have expertise from the legal community, the health community, and the law enforcement community to enable the government to move forward and to ensure that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Colorado has had legalized marijuana for over a year now, and we have started to see the statistics that show the dangers of its decision. According to Reuters, over 40 children were taken to a poison control centre after they picked up colourful sweets laced with strong doses of marijuana that their parents had left lying around.

The government has said it wants to protect children through legalizing marijuana. Could the Minister of Health explain exactly how she plans to do that?

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question from the member opposite illustrates precisely the reason this government feels it is so necessary to change the current regime for the control of marijuana and replace it with something far more comprehensive, far more responsible, and quite frankly, far more effective.

We believe that through strict regulation we will be able to restrict access to children by being able to control the manner in which marijuana is retailed and consumed in this country.

We can do a far better job than the current criminal sanction.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the feds towed the vessel *Silver King* from one riding to mine a month ago. Now it is rotting right off Ladysmith's community dock, and dozens of abandoned vessels cram the harbour already. Local business, Ladysmith council, and the Stz'uminus First Nation all warn that this will harm the local community and economy.

This is a growing issue for our coast, yet the government is shuffling the problem from one community to another. When will the government remove abandoned vessels from Ladysmith's harbour?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when that vessel was reported, the Coast Guard was deployed to respond to a pollution threat by the *Silver King*. It began pumping water from the vessel and concluded that the vessel was no longer seaworthy and was beyond repair. It moved the vessel to a different location, and prior to deconstruction scheduled for later this month, the vessel will be cleaned and hazardous materials and potential pollutants will be removed.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims that gender equality and work-life balance are priorities for him, but some workplace child care services are shutting down as a result of a government decision to stop subsidizing their rent.

The government is turning its back on the parents of children at the early childhood centre at the Guy-Favreau complex in Montreal and the day care centre at the Tunney's Pasture complex here in Ottawa.

When will the Liberals finally reverse this regressive decision made by the Conservatives?

• (1155)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

I share her view regarding the importance of ensuring that all Canadians have access to high-quality, inclusive, flexible, and affordable child care.

As the hon. member knows, we are working very hard with the provinces and territories to guarantee that Canada, and the government in particular, resumes its leadership role in this initiative. Over the next few months, I will have the pleasure of informing the House of the specific actions that will be taken.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health stated this week, "The problem of tamper-resistant opioids, if it is applied only to a single drug, will not solve the problem." The real problem that needs to be solved is why she and the Liberals have abandoned regulations that would require oxycodone, fentanyl, and morphine opioids in Canada to become tamper resistant before being approved for sale in Canada.

Will the Minister of Health please revisit the issue of tamper-resistant regulations to stop dangerous opioid abuse in Canada?

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a registered nurse myself, and we are keenly aware of the damage being done to families and communities right across Canada by the abuse of prescription drugs. We know how complex this issue is.

As part of our comprehensive approach, our government strongly supports opioid manufacturers who wish to take proactive measures to make their medications harder to abuse. Health Canada will continue to work with the industry and health care providers to identify further tools and interventions that can help address this growing problem.

*Oral Questions***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another day and the Liberals break another promise to Canadians.

Post-secondary education is critical for improving quality of life and opportunities for indigenous youth. The Liberals promised to help the first nation and Inuit students through a post-secondary student support program. Instead of keeping their promises, the Liberals are moving in the other direction.

Why did the Liberals break their promise to indigenous students and why are they cutting staff from the program?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and for the excellent opportunity we had at committee yesterday and his good questions there.

As we know, post-secondary education is a really important part of moving students out of poverty and into the labour force. I am working with my colleague the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to make sure that the historic changes from loans to grants will be available for first nation students. We will also work in partnership—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Prince Albert.

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EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's economy continues to suffer under the Liberals. Job numbers today show job losses in April and another 200 jobs were lost again this past week in Regina. The member for Regina—Wascana failed to protect the 200 steelworkers at Regina's Evraz facility who were laid off this week. The Liberals have created a toxic investment climate in Canada and are showing that Canada is closed for business.

When are they going to start supporting the Canadian energy industry so that workers and other Canadians can get back to work?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said many times in the House, the job of our government is to get our natural resources to market. We will continue to work with the National Energy Board in providing the resources it requires to ensure that we have a fulsome and comprehensive review of all major projects that ensures that we are protecting our environment while growing our economy.

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FORT MCMURRAY

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone is saddened by the devastation in Fort McMurray. It is clear that we all have a role to play in helping this community get back on its feet. Many will be looking for immediate support, including access to employment insurance, pension payments, old age support, and other support services. Could the government please tell us what it is doing to ensure that the people of Fort McMurray have the support and resources they need?

● (1200)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians stand by the people of Alberta and Fort McMurray in this terrible catastrophe. Our government is committed to helping Canadians affected by this forest fire and is concerned about the health and safety of workers and families.

Service Canada is making every effort possible to provide direct support and assistance, which can be obtained by calling 1-800-O-Canada, going online at www.servicecanada.gc.ca, or visiting Service Canada centres in areas outside of those evacuated.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the other day I raised the Comeau case, dealing with the right for people to bring beer freely into New Brunswick. Conservatives support this decision and think it is absolutely ridiculous that, in Canada, people cannot bring beer from one province to another. My question is for the Minister of Justice. Has the minister examined this case? Does she agree with the judgment?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, internal trade is a very important priority for this government, as it is a key platform for growth in the economy between provinces all across the country. We are actively working with our provincial and territorial counterparts to make sure we can have freer trade.

There is goodwill and commitment to get this job done, and we look forward to achieving a real renewed agreement in the future. We support the notion of having open markets, to having freer trade in—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs.

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[Translation]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the technology demonstration program is to encourage early-stage research and development and promote collaborative efforts among firms, universities, and research institutions.

This type of initiative is critically important for growing the economy in the 21st century. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development tell the House about the benefits of this program?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs for his question.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development went to Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue to announce a \$54-million contribution to MDA Systems Ltd. in Montreal.

This support will help MDA and its partners develop and test next-generation satellite technologies, which will lead to better radar and search and rescue capabilities, faster data transmission, and improved cloud-based data processing capabilities.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, Saskatchewan had the lowest unemployment rate in the entire country. What a big change we have seen in the last 365 days. Just last month, Cameco announced the layoffs of more than 500 workers at its Rabbit Lake mine, which affects, by the way, hundreds if not thousands of small businesses in our province.

We all know first-hand in Saskatchewan that EI is not the solution. We all know we need job creation, not job-killing taxes. When are the Liberals going to reverse their job-killing business taxes?

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House love to talk about small business.

Our government is committed to ensuring tax fairness and to making sure every Canadian pays his or her share. All our measures are meant to encourage and support small business owners. They are creating good jobs for the middle class, and they are growing our economy for the long term.

What small businesses need more than anything is a strong, thriving economy, and that is the kind of environment our government is working to create through smart, necessary, and prudent investments in our economy, in our communities, and in our middle class.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, French is in decline in Quebec, but the federal government is still giving millions of dollars to lobby groups such as the Quebec Community Groups Network.

For the past 40 years, the federal government has been giving huge amounts of money to anglophone institutions in Quebec that already have more than they need, while failing to provide basic services in French to francophone and Acadian communities.

Does the minister realize that her policy is anglicizing Quebec, proving that independence alone can safeguard the future of French in Quebec?

• (1205)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that our government and our Minister of Canadian Heritage are deeply committed to official languages. This issue is

very important to us, and we will ensure that all of our departments and programs uphold that priority to the best of their ability.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 100 days ago last week, the Minister of Canadian Heritage said that she was paying particular attention to funding cuts affecting current events talk shows of the kind unique to Quebec.

More restrictive criteria for the Canadian film or video production tax credit are still threatening their survival. The criteria themselves have not changed; what has changed is how departmental officials have been instructed to apply them.

Will the minister, who is from Quebec, remind her department—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. Minister of International Development and La Francophonie.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we remain acutely aware of how important it is to distinguish between matters under federal jurisdiction and those under provincial jurisdiction. The Minister of Canadian Heritage is fulfilling her mandate with the utmost respect for her responsibilities.

* * *

SECURITIES

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously rejected the creation of a Canada-wide securities commission six times.

All Quebec MNAs from all political parties said no six times. However, yesterday the federal government published a blueprint for legislation concerning the stability of capital markets. Seriously?

For goodness' sake, will the 40 Quebecers in the government finally step up to the plate and defend the Quebec consensus and Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

Like him, we have two ambitions for Canada: to work together and to work for the well-being of Canadians. For us to work together, provincial jurisdictions must be respected. We announced that this project would be voluntary and that we would listen and fully respect Quebec's jurisdictions. We are prepared to work with the provinces that have indicated that they would like to work separately on the securities project.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to one petition.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled "Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change", signed in New York on April 22, 2016. An explanatory memorandum is included with the treaty.

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CANADA POST

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under section 150 of the Financial Administration Act, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the Canada Post Corporation 2015 Annual Report.

* * *

●(1210)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women in which the committee challenges all members of Parliament to complete the online course, Introduction to Gender-based Analysis Plus, from Status of Women Canada before the House rises for the summer.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, "A Report on the Closure of the Comox Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre".

* * *

PETITIONS

FALUN GONG

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to present two petitions from the people of British Columbia and people from my riding of Chilliwack—Hope.

The first petition deals with the issue of persecution of Falun Gong in China.

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from people in my riding of Chilliwack—Hope, calling on Parliament to support Molly's law.

IRAN

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition about a subject we have been discussing quite a bit this week, the situation with Iran.

The petition specifically calls on the government to ensure that the government of Iran continues to be identified as a state sponsor of terrorism until such time as it stops sponsoring terrorism.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a number of petitions today, five petitions from across Canada.

The petitioners are pointing out that it is impossible for a person to give informed consent to assisted suicide or euthanasia if appropriate palliative care is not available.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on Parliament to establish a national strategy on palliative care.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the second petitions, the petitioners are calling upon the Parliament of Canada to enshrine in the Criminal Code the protection of conscience for physicians and health care institutions from coercion or intimidation to provide or refer physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia.

JUSTICE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December 2014, Cassandra Kaake was murdered. She was 31 weeks pregnant with her preborn daughter Molly.

Molly matters. I have a petition from over 100 people from my constituency of Peace River—Westlock and the town of Barrhead who feel our current Criminal Code needs to be amended to ensure that Molly matters.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to bring a petition to the House of Commons.

Whereas life is sacred unto natural death, it is our duty to provide compassionate hospice care. God is the author of life and death; He will determine when suffering ends; and some can be economically motivated to end life.

The petitioners, citizens of Canada, call upon the House of Commons to continue to prohibit euthanasia and assisted suicide.

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to table a petition to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. This petition amassed 1,310 signatures and calls upon the minister to stop the closure of the Comox Coast Guard. I have spoken at length in the House of Commons on this issue and I will continue to reiterate my full support for the Comox MCTS and the service it provides to our coastal communities.

I want to underline the work of Sara Kalis Gilbert, from Chilliwack, a daughter of a Coast Guard captain. She started a petition on change.org. As of today, it has garnered over 16,000 supporters. I encourage people to sign and share it.

We have the public's support behind us. Would the minister do the right thing?

JUSTICE

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to present a petition for Molly's law.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to pass legislation to allow a separate charge to be laid in the death or injury of a preborn child when that child's mother is a victim of crime.

Canadians want justice for victims like Molly.

• (1215)

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to present a petition today on behalf of the citizens of Revelstoke, in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, with support from people living in Chilliwack, Agassiz, and Harrison Hot Springs on the Lower Mainland.

It is a fairly long petition, so I will shorten it. The petition states that whereas the vast majority of Canadians support modern and enforceable legislation that protects all animals from deliberate and reckless acts of cruelty, we the undersigned residents of Canada call upon the Government of Canada to modernize the animal cruelty provisions in the Criminal Code to effectively protect all animals from deliberate acts of cruelty.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 84 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 84—**Hon. Ed Fast:**

With regard to Canada's delegation at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP21): (a) what is the first and last name of each delegate; (b) which organization did each delegate represent; (c) what is the total cost for using government aircraft to transport delegates to and from Paris; and (d) broken down by

Government Orders

each delegate who stayed in Paris, for how many days and on which dates did the government cover costs?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Finally, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all the parties and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of the Manufacturing Sector, 10 members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be authorized to travel to Mirabel and Montreal, Quebec, in the Spring of 2016, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last considered this question, the hon. member for Ottawa South had five minutes remaining in the time for his comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ottawa South.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again for a few minutes to provide some comments about the important budget we brought down in the country recently.

When I last left off, I was speaking about the need for countries to make investments in learning. In fact, I argue, still argue, have always argued, that the most important investment any country can make is in learning.

I was talking about some of the changes in the budget that dealt with modest and low-income students from families of modest and low-income backgrounds, and the assistance we are providing to help them reach up and break through. We know the single greatest determinant for post-secondary learning of one form or another is whether or not a young person's parents went on past high school.

Government Orders

We are obviously working in lockstep with many of our provincial counterparts. For example, in the province of Ontario, my home province, the government there recently, in its wisdom, decided to cut tuition fees by 50% for families with collective incomes of \$150,000 a year or less. That is a major contribution to making post-secondary education more affordable. Again, in this party and this government, we recognize that learning is paramount if we are going to succeed and continue to succeed in a global economy that is in rapid transition.

A few of the themes I want to talk about that I think are deserving of being addressed are the following. First is seniors. With an aging and rapidly aging population, our government has recognized the need to invest there as well. This is why we have increased the guaranteed income supplement, for example, up to \$947 a year for single seniors. That is income tested, of course.

We are making huge and new investments in retirement, particularly when it comes to infrastructure related to seniors and seniors' housing. It is very important with an aging population. We maintained, of course, pension splitting to help so many senior couples meet the daily challenges of paying bills and staying afloat, living independently and with dignity.

We are working towards enhancing the Canada pension plan. We are working in conjunction with our provincial counterparts, again, co-operating there to try to lift more Canadians going forward to ensure that we do not deal with some of the pension challenges we are facing now in all of our ridings. All of us here have knocked on doors where we face many hundreds, if not thousands of families and individuals who are rightly worried about their retirement and whether they will be able to afford to live with that independence and the dignity I spoke about a moment ago.

We have also restored the eligibility age for the OAS, taking it rightfully, in my view, back to 65 years old from the arbitrary age of 67, a measure brought in by the last government without a single shred of evidence to substantiate the need to do so.

I want to touch upon a few issues. This is an issue that has great bearing on our national capital region. I happen to have the pleasure and the privilege of being chair of the national capital region caucus for the government, embracing some 16 electoral districts and 12 MPs.

We have invested heavily in our national museums. This is an important part of Canada's cultural identity. It is an important part of Canada's future going forward. We have, of course, invested in rail safety. I am also very proud of the work going on right now, led by our Minister of Health in backfilling our national health accord.

We are investing heavily in innovative and new clean economy measures, so that we are the most efficient economy in the world and the cleanest economy in the world.

Last, I would remind Canadians of the \$120 billion over 10 years going into major infrastructure projects, projects that are determined with our local municipal partners and provinces, projects that are ready to go and will have a direct bearing on our quality of life, and of course create that growth that we have not seen in roughly a decade, leveraging money from both provinces and municipalities to enhance our lifestyle, our quality of life, and to create more jobs.

● (1220)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the member did not touch on was the specific decision by the government to eliminate the children's fitness tax credit.

This was a tax credit created that benefited every Canadian child, not just nine out of 10 Canadian children, but actually every child in my riding and every child across the country. It is something that was shown, with evidence, to augment the opportunities for children to be fitter and healthier, and obviously decrease the obesity rate in the country.

I would like to ask the member why the Liberal government, why his government, why he has chosen to eliminate the children's fitness tax credit?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I would say to my colleague that budgets are about choices. They are about allocating scarce resources. In its wisdom, our government decided to eliminate a small number of tax measures in order to bring in a much more generous Canada child benefit. Families making anywhere from \$30,000 to \$90,000 a year in gross income will see major increases in the support they will get for their children.

The difference between our support and the previous government's support for children through our Canada child benefit is that it is tax free. Therefore, it will be a major increase in available income to support children through sports, homework, clothing, backpacks, school supplies, food, and all of the things that will really help so many kids. That is why I said earlier that we are very proud of these investments because they will help lift hundreds of thousands of kids out of poverty.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know when I was walking among many communities in my riding and knocking on doors, one of the things that my constituents spoke to me about again and again was their serious concerns about omnibus bills filled with lots of information that was not adequately debated in the House of Commons.

We now have another one. It is 179 pages long, contains 30 separate statutes, refers to nine different ministries, impacts several others, and contains Bill C-12, which is already on the Order Paper before the House of Commons.

The people in my riding are concerned. How would you respond to them?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how you would respond to these concerns. However, our government is responding to these concerns by making absolutely sure that this debate is fulsome, that it continues, and that we talk about the very details that the member highlights. This budget will be taken back to the finance committee where we will be hearing from dozens of witnesses on the specifics and the merits of all of these provisions. It is all there in the light of day. It is all transparent. People can raise issues and concerns with their MPs.

Government Orders

I invite the member, if she has any specific concerns on behalf of her constituents on any of these measures, to approach either the relevant minister, the Minister of Finance, or any of her parliamentary colleagues on this side of the House.

• (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague could speak to the genuine investments that will be made into Canada's infrastructure, and what this budget will do in terms of helping to build a stronger, healthier Canada through infrastructure spending. I know that he is very familiar with the file, and I thought that he could provide some comment on how important it is to invest in infrastructure.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is foundational to our ability to compete.

We will be having a debate in this House shortly about a particular motion brought by a colleague with respect to imposing some, if I can call it, green conditionality to backstop our infrastructure spending. We have a chance in this country to lead a race. The race is all about becoming the most efficient economy in the world. The German authorities know it, the American government knows it, and the Israeli government knows it. We're embroiled in a race, and our infrastructure investments are critical to making sure that we can compete, particularly as a rapidly urbanizing country, which Canada is, alongside for that matter pretty much every other nation-state in the world.

We have a real opportunity to invest in the foundational infrastructure that we need: light rail, housing, support for our seniors, and water and waste water systems. These assets are the pillars, the foundation, upon which we build. They provide us the support to go on, for example, to conquer global markets. Just yesterday I had the privilege of announcing a \$525,000 grant for a major company located in my riding. It is doing incredible software and hardware work around the world with respect to hotel management systems.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I would like to inform hon. members that there have been more than five hours of debate on this motion during this first round. Consequently, the maximum time allocated for all subsequent interventions shall be ten minutes for speeches and five minutes for questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey.

[*English*]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I would like to express my deepest sympathies to the thousands of families who have lost their homes and businesses and are currently displaced from Fort McMurray, Alberta. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. I ask all Canadians to support the relief efforts by the Red Cross at www.redcross.ca. It is at these times when I think Canadians' generosity and our Canadian unity are exemplified. The people of Fort McMurray are resilient, and I know they will rebuild. I want to thank the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta for offering their matching dollars in the time

of need for these Canadians. As I say, this is the time when we see Canadian generosity and Canadian unity truly exemplified.

I rise in the House today to speak about an important issue for the people of Simcoe—Grey. The budget of the Government of Canada is the centrepiece of the government's agenda and policies. With the new Liberal government, this budget represents a sharp contrast between the Liberal promises and the day-to-day reality of Canadians.

During the election, there were many commitments made, and promises that were made along the way. However, the reality of this budget, and most important its impact on Canadians, leaves many of us quite baffled.

[*Translation*]

Election campaigns, parliamentary debates, selfies, and state dinners are one thing, but this budget is another. This budget will have a significant negative impact on the lives of Canadians. The Liberals are spending freely, borrowing billions of dollars, and taking benefits away from families and small businesses. In short, the Liberals are jeopardizing our future.

[*English*]

On March 22, the Liberals announced their budget. They are now borrowing and spending over \$29.4 billion while they have eliminated benefits to families, students, and small businesses. This is simply not responsible, and at some point in time someone will be paying for all this. Quite frankly, whether it is us today or the next several generations of Canadians, someone will have to pay off this debt.

Why we as Conservatives actually care about this borrowing and spending and the creation of this debt is that, for us, lowering taxes, balancing budgets, and having less debt, the type of government that we ran, is not an end in itself but rather a means to a greater end. The end is more freedom and prosperity for Canadians overall. It is more freedom to support programs that helped our veterans and seniors, like the tax-free savings account; to support programs that supported students and young Canadians; and to support small-business owners to harness their entrepreneurial spirit and the great opportunities to help grow their communities. We believe in hard work on this side of the House, and we also believe that hard work should be rewarded.

When we are free, we have an ability to provide for others. When we are free from taxation and free from a burden of debt, which the current government will create, we are able to go out and help others. Helping others at home and abroad is what unifies us as Canadians. Our Canadian history is rooted in that generosity for individuals. It is this Canadian identity that we must work hard to preserve, particularly as we debate this important piece of legislation.

I can say in contrast that the current Liberal government is not focused on that. The current Liberal government is not focused on reducing that burden on Canadians. The current Liberal government is actually mortgaging the future of our nation.

Government Orders

[Translation]

I have always been concerned about children. I am therefore disappointed in the government's decision to eliminate the children's fitness tax credit. This decision means that Canadian families will have less money in their pockets.

[English]

In 2006, I was asked by the federal Conservative government to chair a panel on the children's fitness tax credit, to make recommendations on how to improve the health and physical fitness of Canadian kids. The tax credit encouraged families to help their kids become more physically active, actually having a direct impact on reducing the obesity rates of Canadian kids. I am exceptionally disappointed that the current government would decide to get rid of an initiative that improved the health of Canadian children, one that impacted all Canadian kids. That is not just 9 out of ten Canadian kids, as the Liberals like to speak about, with their benefits being for 9 out of ten Canadian families, but every Canadian child.

• (1230)

For me, this is exceptionally important. They have eliminated the children's arts tax credit, income splitting, the textbooks tax credit, the education tax credit, and the small business tax credit.

For small business owners, saying that they are tax avoiders is simply wrong. In my riding of Simcoe—Grey, the small business people go out and work hard so they can give back to our communities generously. Whether that be Charlie Tatham or Simon Ainley or Chris Crozier, they have all built our communities in my riding.

In addition, the Liberals have not focused on Canadian farmers. In my riding, it is important. They feed our Canadian families.

Finally, with regard to Canadian Forces Base Borden, another decade of darkness will be faced, with the reduction of \$3.7 billion in defence spending.

Canadians deserve better. We actually have an opportunity to do better. I encourage individuals to review the bill and vote against it, because it is not in the best interests of Canadians.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member is actually serious when she says that the Conservatives left us with less debt than when they arrived. That is one of the more entertaining comments I have heard so far today.

The Conservatives have not managed to balance a budget in over 130 or 140 years, after having entered office with a deficit. They have never taken us from deficit to surplus, not once since the 1900s. Last year, the government left us with a significant deficit, and it is getting worse. I would like to hear the opposition's explanation.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite. The deficit is getting much worse. The government promised a \$10-billion deficit, which I found quite concerning to begin with, but it is actually \$29.4 billion.

Ours was a government that the parliamentary budget officer has already reported had us in the black. In fact, we were over \$7 billion

in the black, as reported in February. However, our now Liberal Minister of Finance says that is just a thing to consider.

Let us be serious. The Liberal government is mortgaging the future of Canadian families and the future of younger Canadians. I encourage them to think again and actually put young Canadians first.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

However, I have a question for her about the children's fitness tax credit. I agree with her that it is not a good thing that the Liberals are eliminating that tax credit without replacing it with another plan to encourage physical activity.

At the same time, I placed several written questions on the Order Paper about that tax credit in the previous Parliament to ask the Conservative government at the time whether it had studies to show that the tax credit had actually helped young people who were not already participating in sports to do so. Unfortunately, every time I asked the question, I was told that no such studies existed.

Can the member tell me on what grounds she is claiming that this tax credit actually encouraged young people, poor young people or those who were not already participating in sports, to do so?

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, actually there is data. I encourage him to go on PubMed and look it up. It shows that the implementation of these kinds of tax-free or positive incentives to have families and children participate show that more children participate. That is why it is so disappointing that the Liberal government has eliminated the children's fitness tax credit. Not only was it a tax credit for some families, but it was a subsidy for other families who were not eligible for a tax credit. Every Canadian child benefited from it.

I am happy to instruct the member that if he would like to look it up on PubMed, there are several articles published on this. However, let us be frank. This is actually about Canadian kids and the Liberal government abandoning them at a time when they need encouragement to get out there and play, to get on the playground. We know that is good for Canadian children's health.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a bit of a contradiction in the Conservative's approach. We have heard from time to time, on other matters, that parents should be left to decide for themselves how to spend their money. That was the argument they had against any kind of mandated child care. Certainly, one would have to agree that the Canada child benefit, by replacing all of these very directive boutique tax cuts, in fact does precisely that. Not only that, it does it tax free, and it puts more money in the pockets of Canadians.

Therefore, given that people could use the Canada child benefit to replace all of these boutique tax cuts, would the hon. member not agree that families are actually better off with more flexibility and more money in their pockets?

Government Orders

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I guess what I have issue with is that our initiatives actually impacted every Canadian family and every Canadian child. As the Liberals will say again and again themselves, only 9 out of ten actually benefit from what they are doing.

As my colleague earlier mentioned, one can be in a family, maybe a nurse or a teacher, and these individuals do not even benefit from what the Liberal government is doing now.

What our party focused on was making sure that every single Canadian family benefited. Every single Canadian family had more money back in their pockets, as opposed to what the Liberal government is doing, which is augmenting our debt and deficit, taking that money out of their pockets and giving it to the Government of Canada.

I think Canadians should have that money back in their pockets so that they can make great decisions for their families.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of budget 2016, and specifically Bill C-15.

At the outset, I want to let this House now how proud I am of this budget, and how proud I am to be part of a government that believes in Canada, believes in Canadians, and believes in restoring hope and rewarding hard work.

This government is taking on what the past government could not, which is giving Canadians relief where it is needed most and removing measures that provided little to no help to many Canadians.

Investment is desperately needed, and it is needed now. Canada has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio of any G7 country, and interest rates are at historic lows. Now is the ideal time for Canada to invest in its future success.

The strategic and smart investments in budget 2016 will strengthen and expand the middle class, reduce inequality among Canadians, and what I think is especially important, position Canada for sustained economic growth for years to come.

There are five important points that I would like to make in the House today about Bill C-15. One is the elimination of the boutique tax credits. Second is the Canada child tax benefit, which will help more people, tax free. Third, I will talk a little about much-needed help for seniors. Fourth, I will talk about connecting people with their tax benefits more efficiently and, last but not least, support for veterans.

We speak a lot about fairness in this House: fairness in our marketplace, for our constituents, and fairness throughout this great country. However, in the past, this fairness was hindered by promises that were just an illusion for many Canadian families.

The past government created a series of boutique tax credits. These were many small, seemingly significant benefits that were designed to help Canadians, but frankly were simply smoke and mirrors. There were tax credits, like the children's fitness tax credit and the children's art tax credit, which appear at first glance to help all families. However, families quickly realized that they only

provided a 15% tax credit on the first \$500 for families who could already afford these activities. It did nothing for those families who could not afford the activities in the first place.

For many Canadian families, the reality is that after food, shelter, and all other necessities, little is left over to help their children become more involved in the community through extracurricular activities. This means that those who needed it most were unable to garner that support.

Bill C-15 is one of the first steps this government is taking to better distribute benefits and programs more fairly to those who need it the most. That means removing the boutique tax credits and ensuring that support goes to those who need it, the low and medium-income families of Canada.

I think we can all agree that it is essential that Canada invest in its children. This government is also working hard to distribute money to those who need it most through the new Canada child benefit.

Canada's existing child benefit system is complicated, and it is not tax free nor income tested. The system set forth by the previous government is flawed and ultimately inadequate in meeting the demands of so many Canadian families. Once again, it does not target those who need it the most.

Our government will focus on giving Canadian families more money to help with the high cost of raising their children by replacing the current complicated system with the new CCB. This new system will provide a maximum annual benefit of up to \$6,400 per child under the age of six, and up to \$5,400 per child for those aged six through 17. Families with less than \$30,000 in net income will receive the maximum benefit.

With the introduction of this much better targeted Canada child benefit, about 300,000 fewer children will be living in poverty by 2017. There will be 300,000 young Canadians with greater opportunity and greater hope for their future.

This government has also made a clear commitment to improving the lives of seniors. A key element of this commitment is improving the quality of life for seniors through strengthening public pensions and increasing social infrastructure funding for seniors living.

• (1240)

The government would make significant new investments to support seniors in their retirement years. These increased benefits would ensure that Canadian seniors have a dignified, comfortable, and secure retirement. While Canada's retirement income system has been successful in reducing the incidence of poverty among Canadian seniors, many seniors continue to be at risk of living in poverty.

Budget 2016 has committed to increasing the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit to \$947 annually for the most vulnerable single seniors, which would support those seniors who rely almost exclusively on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. Our senior population is growing, and this government understands that every individual deserves a retirement that is safe, affordable, and ultimately, sustainable for years to come.

Government Orders

Not only would these benefits be available to those who need it most, but this government has also made it clear that it wants all Canadians to be aware of tax benefits for which they qualify. While the tax system seems overwhelming and daunting to so many Canadians, this government would increase accessibility through outreach and simplified tax return processes. Through proactive outreach, Canadians are more likely to know of and collect the benefits they deserve.

With fewer slips and credits to claim, Canadians' tax returns would be simpler. This reflects a new approach for government, one that offers immediate help for those who need it most and helps to set the course for growth for all Canadians.

Budget 2016 is an ambitious long-term plan to strengthen the heart of Canada's economy, but I also want to highlight the commitment to veterans that is found in this implementation bill. I think we can all agree in the House that the government has a sacred obligation to veterans, an obligation we must meet with respect, gratitude, and appreciation. Our brave veterans have dedicated their lives to the defence of our great nation, and they are worthy of our unwavering support. We will give back to our veterans, who have given so much in service to all Canadians. The budget would restore critical access to services for veterans and ensure the long-term financial success of disabled veterans.

Once again, I am proud to support this budget and encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of Bill C-15. By investing in those who need it most, we will make vast improvements in the lives of so many Canadians. Support for our children, support for our seniors, and support for our veterans are important to all Canadians.

Further, budget 2016 is a clear step toward a prosperous future. It offers immediate help to those who need it most and lays the groundwork for sustained, inclusive economic growth that will benefit Canadian families for years to come. When Canadians have more money to save, more money to invest, and more money to grow our economy, everyone benefits.

Making investments in these critical areas will be great for all Canadians. I urge all members in the House to support Bill C-15.

● (1245)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora. He indicated that tax credits like the sports and fitness tax credit had to be eliminated in order to pay for the fiscal measures, the tax plan, of the Liberal Party. However, during the last election campaign when Liberals went to Canadians to ask for their votes, that is not what they told them. They told them that they were going to pay for it through a number of specified measures: the elimination of the universal child care benefit, which they are doing, the establishment of a new high tax bracket, which they have done, and the elimination of income splitting, which is also happening. All of those tax grabs were going to take place. That was going to finance their plan, and that was it.

Nowhere in their platform did they say anything about eliminating the sports and fitness tax credit for children or eliminating the children's arts credit. No, they did not tell Canadians that. They did not tell Canadians that they planned to eliminate the textbook tax credit. They did not tell Canadians they planned to eliminate the

education tax credit. All of those things were to be untouched. They were not necessary to pay for this plan. However, today we are hearing a new tune, that they actually were necessary to pay for their plan.

Why is it that they told Canadians something totally different about the tax hikes they had in mind during the election campaign and then hit them with a surprise whole second set of tax hikes after the election to pay for promises Conservatives had said were not affordable?

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, the member's riding is just north of my riding of Newmarket—Aurora. If he wants to talk about the election and what was said, let me tell the House what I heard when I was knocking on doors in Newmarket—Aurora. I heard families complaining that they could not afford to put their children in sports. How is the tax benefit going to help them? People with children six, seven, and eight years old could not even afford to put their kids in basketball or hockey or baseball.

The member said here is a tax credit. All of us know that tax credits do not work if we do not have any money in our pockets to pay for a service to begin with. That is the problem with the member's way of thinking. That is the problem with his former government's way of thinking. The Conservatives think a tax credit will solve everything. We all know that the Conservative government's boutique tax credits were political gimmicks that helped no one but the Conservative Party.

I was happy to talk to the people of Newmarket—Aurora. I was happy to tell them that what we need more than tax credit gimmicks is money for young families so their children can play the same sports as other families' children play. Just because they do not have enough money, their children should not be denied that opportunity and the joy of being a child.

I am happy to stand with a government that will make that more possible when this government—

● (1250)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I get started, I want to send our condolences and our thoughts to the people of Fort McMurray. There are many people in Courtenay—Alberni who have family members there and who are affected by that horrible situation. I want to thank the members who have come from Alberta to make sure those people are represented today.

Government Orders

I want to thank the member for talking about inequality and those who need a hand and a lift up. We talk about gimmicks. I worry about the promises of tax breaks for the middle class, gimmick tax cuts that 17.9 million Canadians would not benefit from, and a promise to reduce taxes for small business from 11% to 9%.

Today I heard members across the floor say things like small business owners are not good fiscal money managers and they are tax cheats. It worries me when I hear things like that. These are our neighbours. These are the economic drivers of our communities. That is not how we should be talking about the people who built our communities, who donate to our local community organizations, who volunteer, like volunteer firefighters or auxiliary coast guard people. If we make promises to support small business, then we should follow through with those promises. We cannot have a healthy community with a weak business community.

Would the member apologize to the small business people in his community for the broken promise the Liberals made to small business people? Will the other members go home to their communities and apologize for that broken promise?

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member about the small businesses in my riding. I was a member of the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce long before I had political dreams or aspirations, so I know many small businesses in Newmarket and Aurora. The chambers of commerce support this budget.

The member should not tell me that we do not support small business. We on this side of the House do not need to take lectures about supporting small business from anybody. We support small businesses. We support family businesses. We also support anybody who is working hard.

Nine million Canadians will receive the middle class tax cuts. That is not insignificant.

We can all agree that small and medium-size enterprises are the backbone of our economy. There are so many great entrepreneurs all over Canada, especially in Newmarket—Aurora, and we are pleased to support them.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has tabled its first budget, and as you have seen, we are following through on the commitments we have made to Canadians. The budget implementation act no. 1 is a critical step toward revitalizing the economy and to providing support to the middle class and creating the conditions for long-term growth.

We would do this by making significant investments in infrastructure, with over \$60 billion over the next 10 years in public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure. We would do this through the introduction of the Canada child benefit. We would do this by providing help to our most vulnerable seniors.

Canada is facing a difficult economic situation. We know that. We also know that Canada is coming off 10 years of weak economic growth, and we are taking steps to address that at the same time as we are creating opportunities for the middle class and for all Canadians, for jobs, for affordable living arrangements, and for new places to work and rehabilitative places to play. As we lay the foundation for long-term and sustained growth, we are also looking

at the immediate needs of the country and its citizens, which our budget addresses.

As we have committed, we would be investing in three strategic areas: public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure. Everyone in this room knows that there are significant benefits to infrastructure investments in the short, medium, and long term. Well-planned investments in infrastructure generate economic growth, create jobs, and leave a lasting legacy for Canadians. Infrastructure is the foundation that shapes our communities making them more liveable and sustainable, and providing the places where we want to live, work, and play.

Our infrastructure investments must be made strategically, collaboratively, and with a long-term vision. They need to focus on projects that are not only shovel-ready, but also shovel-worthy. All orders of government have a role to play in building strong communities and a strong country.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities worked collaboratively with government partners and indigenous communities, as well as stakeholder and municipal association partners. Thanks to their input and their work, we have an infrastructure plan that would support the long-term and short-term needs of the country. As we implement the short-term aspects of this plan, it would be through collaboration with these same partners that we would be successful at rehabilitating, recapitalizing, and renewing the infrastructure we have.

By focusing on repairing our existing infrastructure, we can fix what we have now instead of delaying and paying more to fix it later. These investments are critically important to improving the lives of middle-class Canadians. They would make it easier to get around our country, to find jobs, and to build a future. However, it is far from the only thing we would do to help the middle class.

The Canada child benefit, which I mentioned earlier, would be the most significant development in this country's social policy in a generation. It would be far more generous than the universal child care benefit it replaces, giving nine in 10 Canadian families more money in their pockets each month. On average, families would receive \$2,300 more per year. That is more money to spend on sports programs, school supplies, music lessons, and trips to the museums. Unlike the universal child care benefit, our new Canada child benefit would be tax-free.

Our government believes strongly that Canadians should not have to pay taxes on benefits given to them by their government to help improve their children's lives. The CCB would also be simpler than the universal child care benefit. The previous government's hodgepodge of child care benefits was confusing, and that made it difficult to access for far too many families. Now families can look forward to a cheque in the mail each and every month.

Government Orders

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the new Canada child benefit would be fairer than the program it replaces. Why? It is because, unlike the UCCB, the benefit is means-tested. It would deliver the maximum benefit to those who need it the most and be gradually reduced according to income. This means that the government would no longer be sending cheques to millionaires and instead would be able to provide more significant, much-needed relief to those who need it most, to help them as they work to build a better future for themselves and for their children.

• (1255)

A single mom with one child under the age of six and earning \$30,000 a year will receive an annual benefit of \$6,400 tax-free, while a family with two children, one six or older and one under six, earning approximately \$90,000 will receive \$5,600, or \$2,500 more than they get today under the current system.

This is about more than just extra pocket money. It is about empowering middle-class families, boosting local economies and giving parents a little extra confidence when planning for the future.

Equally important, however, is how Canadians expect to spend their later years. Our seniors have worked their entire lives, started businesses, raised children, contributed to their communities, and paid their taxes. Bill C-15 makes significant new investments to support seniors in their retirement years.

Canada's retirement income system has generally been successful in reducing the incidence of poverty among Canadian seniors over time, but some seniors continue to be at a heightened risk of living on a low income, especially seniors who live alone.

Single seniors are nearly three times more likely to live in low income, and that seems like a particularly unfair set of circumstances. That is why today's legislation will increase the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit by more than \$947 annually for the most vulnerable single seniors, starting in July 2016. This will help support those seniors who are most at risk of experiencing financial difficulties. This enhancement more than doubles the current maximum top-up and will improve the financial security of about 900,000 single seniors across Canada.

Our government has an ambitious plan to support the middle class and those working hard to join it. Each and every member from this party is invested in seeing this agenda realized. With the introduction of budget 2016 and the budget implementation act, we are one step closer to fulfilling our promise to Canadians, but we will not stop there. This government will work each and every day to better the lives of Canadians. We will never stop and we will not be satisfied until each and every person in this country has a fair shot at success.

• (1300)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about seniors, and certainly when I went door to door, I saw a lot of seniors really struggling. They did not have enough savings to live comfortably, so I do appreciate the increase of 10% in the GIS, but \$18 a week is not as much as they need.

I wonder if the member could comment on why the government has cut the amount of money we could put into a TFSA, which 11 million Canadians were taking advantage of in order to save for their future. Could she comment on that?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to improving the conditions of seniors in this country. We do not want any seniors to be living in poverty, and particularly, not only are we increasing the GIS, but we are also investing in ways that we can change the tax policy.

When two people are living, perhaps one in a nursing home and one wants to stay in their home, we are addressing mechanisms to support them as well.

Furthermore, we are also looking at ensuring that seniors have a better opportunity for their retirement. We are committed to seniors in that regard.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member touched on a number of different things in her speech, certainly inequality and helping to support the growth of the economy.

Previously I was the executive director of a very successful chamber of commerce on the west coast of British Columbia. There were 350 chamber members and I cannot think of one of them being a tax cheat or any who were not good fiscal managers. They were contributors to our economy. They always complained that they felt things were not fair in Canada around taxes.

Under Liberal and Conservative governments for decades we have seen tax breaks for Canada's largest corporations and nothing for small business people.

Does the member feel that Canada's largest corporations are paying their fair share, and does she think small business owners should be getting a reduction in their taxes as promised by the Liberals in their campaign?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is a philosophical question in many respects.

We need to look at what we are doing to invest in the economy, and what the critical foundations are at any given point in time. We have a significant infrastructure deficit in this country. Without having that foundation, many large and small corporations are choosing not to grow and expand in our country. What that means is we are losing jobs, and we are not benefiting from any kind of opportunity going forward.

By investing in infrastructure, we are ensuring that there is a strong foundation, not only immediately in the short term by creating jobs for those people who are going to provide that infrastructure, but for the mid and long terms by creating an environment where companies are going to want to come to Canada to grow and expand their businesses.

This is beneficial not only for large corporations but for small and medium-sized corporations as well, because they benefit from the local dollars in their communities and from the revenue generation that those larger organizations provide.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member talk a little about Canada's child benefit, and some of the boutique tax credits the former government used to have in place?

I remember being in the military, with three young children, and not making a lot of money. It was around \$50,000. My wife was at home, working with the children at home. We used to laugh at the tax credits in that they were actually not going to make a huge difference in the lives of a lot of our fellow citizens. They were not going to make a difference in our lives.

Could the member talk about what she thinks streamlining this process, making it more efficient, will do not only for government operations but also perhaps for the lives of average Canadians?

• (1305)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I was also fortunate to serve in the Canadian Forces. As an officer, I was responsible for many of the people who worked for me who came to me asking for my assistance with their taxes and often asking for help with their finances. That is what the military family does.

Certainly, for the tax credits, they had to have spent a certain amount of money on sports programs, art programs, dance programs. For those families that do not have money to put food on their table, they do not have the money to invest in those sports programs and those dance programs. Therefore, giving them a tax credit and benefit on their taxes for the money that they spent to offset it is of no value to them.

These families needed an opportunity to have money in their pockets right from day one through lower taxes, as we have lowered the middle-class taxes, and through a child benefit that is directed at them, based on their income.

A monthly cheque is going to overwhelmingly provide additional support to those families in Canada with children who absolutely need it the most.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her military service.

I think it is important to speak to members in this House about the specific measures in budget 2016 for veterans and how those measures will affect them. Nevertheless, before I address the more specific aspects of the budget, I want to note that my colleagues, the people of my riding of Beauport—Limoilou, and I all share concerns that the Liberal government is planning some exorbitant spending for this year and the years to come.

In light of Canada's current economic climate, the Liberal government's plan to run large deficits over many years is unjustified. Unfortunately, the government is essentially handing out money that has been borrowed instead of earned.

Furthermore, the government is breaking a number of its election promises, and we are just a few months in. This is surprising, since some of these promises were key planks in the Liberal platform. First, there was the promise to restrict deficit spending to a maximum of \$10 billion, which has changed. I would remind members that the deficit spending was supposed to be used to invest in infrastructure, not to subsidize new recurring programs.

Then, the government promised to focus upcoming financial efforts on balancing the budget by the end of its term, which is no longer achievable. The other disappointment was the broken promise

Government Orders

to lower the tax rate for small and medium-sized businesses, which create wealth for everyone.

I will set these concerns aside and get to the essence of my speech, which is the budget measures put forward to address the needs of our veterans.

I want to note that these measures were first presented separately from the federal 2016 budget, in Bill C-12, an act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. This bill was introduced barely one month ago. I thought it was a good sign that the Liberals introduced this legislation, since there was no notion of partisanship on veterans' issues.

As a result, as the official opposition veterans' critic, I was planning to support Bill C-12 and vote in favour of it to help this government take positive action for our veterans, even though I felt that some amendments were necessary to fix certain technical issues.

This is also why I worked enthusiastically and passionately to urge my Conservative colleagues to do the same and vote in favour of Bill C-12, since, overall, it seemed that this bill would improve the well-being of our veterans.

Right now, though, that bill no longer exists. It is part of Bill C-15, the 2016 federal budget, an omnibus bill. As a result, since I will be opposing the 2016 federal budget for reasons of both content and form, and since the measures for veterans have been absorbed by that bill because of inappropriate partisanship, I will have to bear the burden of voting against those measures.

I would like to tell the veterans who are watching that my support for them is unwavering and that my vote against the budget in no way means that I am voting against measures that are good for them.

I will promise veterans this: raw, ruthless honesty that holds nothing back when necessary.

That is why I will be loud and clear today about which of these measures are acceptable to me and which ones are problematic and counterproductive.

No, the government's approach to veterans' issues is not perfect, and yes, it is my duty as the official opposition critic to identify major flaws.

Together, then, let us identify the measures put forward in the 2016 federal budget that will help veterans, measures that pertain to financial benefits in particular.

The budget proposes increasing the disability award, expanding access to higher grades of the permanent impairment allowance, and increasing the earnings loss benefit.

One observation immediately comes to mind regarding the political will and, in this case, the legislative will of the Liberal government to move forward with these improvements to allowances and benefits.

Government Orders

They are consistent with the approach that the Conservative Party of Canada had been taking since 2006, an approach that involves constantly improving the financial benefits that veterans are entitled to under the new veterans charter. The charter must be interpreted and amended through the lens of the living tree doctrine, which allows for changes in how our laws are worded and interpreted.

That is why, in recent years, in accordance with this philosophical approach, we in the Conservative Party brought forward various modifications and new measures with respect to this charter that have had a positive impact on veterans. Those measures include things like improvements to the permanent impairment allowance, the new retirement income security benefit, the new family caregiver relief benefit, and the new critical injury benefit.

Like us, the Liberals are adding benefits and allowances to the charter, in other words, increasing financial benefits here and there as the needs of our veterans evolve.

By all accounts, that is commendable. However, I think there are a few glaring problems arising from the Minister of Veterans Affairs's determination to proceed down this path. The improvements in budget 2016 do not address the urgent issues that individual veterans have brought to my attention.

As far as the disability award is concerned, the retroactive increase to the maximum payout draws on considerable financial resources, roughly \$3.7 billion that could have been used more effectively. For example, that money could have been used to improve the assistance provided to family members of a veteran who is suffering, to enhance mental health services, and to implement a completely renewed approach to the transition from military life to civilian life and to the bureaucratic services provided to our veterans.

When it comes to these transition services, I very sincerely believe that we are currently at a crossroads regarding our veterans and the help we would like to give them.

Either we continue increasing the benefits, since that is the easiest thing to do, or we cut through the Gordian knot at the root of the problem that veterans are experiencing in their everyday lives. This is the next battle in their lives, the one they must wage in order to get help and an attentive ear at Veterans Affairs Canada, where they unfortunately face a systematically rigid and calculating bureaucracy.

• (1310)

The minister says he wants to help veterans, and that is a good thing. Therefore, he must get rid of the department's sometimes abusive bureaucracy once and for all, as it is characterized by a structure that too often dismisses veterans' requests and needs.

We must acknowledge one irrefutable fact: our veterans suffered in battle and they often return with problems that give rise to terrible mental health issues or physical conditions. These men and women in uniform not only made personal sacrifices. Above all, they dedicated their lives to serving Canada by defending our political principles, which from time to time vacillate even here in the House.

That is why those who are forced to leave the Canadian Armed Forces for medical reasons more often than not feel bitter and

betrayed and as though they have lost their country's support for their commitment and ultimately for themselves.

The current veterans' movement includes a multitude of groups and claims often involving an increase in financial benefits.

I truly believe that these financial claims are motivated by injuries that go much deeper and require systemic help that goes far beyond any specific amount of money.

Veterans want respect from their own department, Veterans Affairs Canada. This department, which is the main source of assistance for our veterans in need, has to make major changes to its administrative approach and its established culture. The government needs to take real action on this, not just make announcements with no real meaning.

I believe that the Minister of Veterans Affairs needs to launch a comprehensive review of his department's administrative culture, including a review of staff conduct and of the regulations and structures that determine employees' everyday practices as well as the type and nature of services offered to veterans.

The minister needs to change the status quo. That is the real task he needs to undertake.

• (1315)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the opposition member's speech.

I have a few comments to make in that regard. When I served in the army, I found that all governments have nice things to say about veterans. Veterans are seen as sacred people who must be protected. However, when the time comes to truly protect those veterans and do something for them, these governments do nothing.

It was the same thing with the Conservative government. It cut 800 public service jobs. These employees were offering direct services to veterans. I am proud that we are currently making investments to help veterans. The Conservatives also made cuts to pensions that gave veterans a fixed amount each month. We are talking to veterans so that we can try to fix that.

I am very disappointed that members are talking about this today without really taking into account the actions of the previous government, which was unable to turn its words into action. I am proud that we are doing that with our veterans today.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent question.

What I was trying to say in my speech is that the Liberals are implementing measures to increase financial benefits, which we did. It must be done because that is what veterans' advocacy groups want.

Government Orders

I am going farther than that today. I am saying that although the system that has been in place in Canada for the past 15 years is important because benefits have to be there, it must do more. We have to tackle one of the other problems veterans are facing, and that is their everyday relationship with Veterans Affairs Canada officials. Not only is the transition problematic, but there is a problem with having to fill in forms and the department's attitude toward veterans.

We have no choice but to tackle this issue. We are doing so in committee, and that is why I am talking about it today.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's indignation at the fact that Bill C-12 was put into an omnibus bill. However, I would like to remind him that the Conservatives also introduced undemocratic bills like this one that evince disrespect for Parliament.

Also under the Conservatives, wounded veterans were forced to prove, year after year, that the legs they lost in the line of duty had not magically reappeared. That is utterly unacceptable, and it literally adds insult to injury. Unfortunately, that practice will not change under the new government.

Is the member concerned about the fact that this bill fails to ensure that practice will end?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right; the bill is hardly all-inclusive.

I want to say to my colleague that I have no qualms about answering this in regard to omnibus bills. The problem with the Liberals is that they refuse to take personal responsibility. We never said that omnibus bills are necessarily bad; meanwhile, the Liberals say they are against them, but then turn around and use them barely six months later.

An omnibus bill might be introduced for partisan or rational reasons, for instance, to pass measures quickly before the end of a parliamentary session.

In this instance, I am convinced that the government included measures for veterans in this omnibus bill not for pragmatic or rational reasons, but rather for partisan reasons.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. It is great to have him on our team.

Earlier today, one of my colleagues in the Liberal Party indicated that this budget will leave a last legacy for Canadians, and I could not agree more. Unfortunately, the lasting legacy is mountains and mountains of debt. If we look at the debt charges alone on page 234, we will see that between 2015 to 2020, the interest charges alone increase by almost \$10 billion.

I would like my colleague to comment on what the impact of this extra debt charge will do to the future economic prosperity of our country.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: It is a lasting legacy, indeed, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

My colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska used an excellent metaphor.

When a couple goes to the bank to get a mortgage for their home, measures are taken to ensure that the couple's children will not be left to pay for the house later on, and that is exactly what a federal budget should do.

Unfortunately, we can see today that the Liberals are not making sure that the mortgage will be paid off before the kids get the house.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst to resume debate, I must inform him that he will have only about eight minutes for his speech.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, a very important day is being celebrated this Sunday, Mother's Day. I want to take this opportunity to wish a happy Mother's Day to all mothers in the world, but especially my mother, my mother-in-law, and my wife for our two beautiful daughters.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to Budget Implementation Act, 2016, No. 1. and its important role in helping revitalize the economy and provide greater support to middle-class Canadians.

This bill, Budget Implementation Act, 2016, No. 1., enables us to take a very important step towards ensuring the long-term prosperity of Canadians, and our government is proud to sponsor it.

With budget 2016, the Government of Canada is taking an essential step towards growing the middle class and revitalizing the Canadian economy.

Budget 2016 puts people first and provides Canadians the help they need now, not 10 years from now.

The budget reflects a new approach for the government, an approach that provides immediate help to those who need it most and clears the way for the kind of growth that all Canadians will benefit from.

Budget 2016 is an ambitious long-term plan to reinforce the heart of the Canadian economy, namely the middle class. With this budget, the Government of Canada is investing for years and decades to come. We are investing for our children and our grandchildren so that they can inherit a more prosperous Canada, full of hope and optimism.

With smart investments and its focus on fairness, the government will ensure that the best is yet to come for Canada. Canada's best days are in front of us.

We introduced a new Canada child benefit in budget 2016. This benefit will help parents better support what is most precious to them, their children. The Canada child benefit is a simpler, more generous tax-free benefit for Canadians. It is also better targeted than current benefits to those who need it most. It will help hundreds of thousands of children living in poverty.

Private Members' Business

With the passage of this bill, families with children under 18 will receive a maximum annual benefit of up to \$6,400 per child under the age of six, and up to \$5,400 per child aged six through 17, beginning in July. Nine out of ten families will receive more money than they do now. This benefit will help parents with the high cost of raising their children.

If members support the budget implementation bill, they will be providing direct support to Canadian parents and will help them save for their children's futures. At the core of our plan is the idea that when you have an economy that works for the middle class, you have a country that works for everyone.

However, one factor that is just as important is Canadians' hopes for their later years. Our seniors have worked hard their whole lives. They started businesses, raised children, contributed to their communities, and paid their taxes.

The Budget Implementation Act, 2016, No. 1, provides for significant new investments to support seniors in their retirement. Canada's retirement income system has been successful in reducing the incidence of poverty among Canadian seniors. However, some seniors continue to be at heightened risk of living in low income, particularly single seniors.

Our country's compassion should be judged by how we treat our most vulnerable. Therefore, it is very important that we help our seniors have a comfortable and dignified retirement.

This budget will help seniors have a comfortable and dignified retirement by making significant new investments to support these seniors in their retirement. The passage of this bill will cancel the provisions in the Old Age Security Act that increase the age of eligibility for old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits from 65 to 67.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

•(1325)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We have about two more minutes to go.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, restoring the eligibility age for old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits to 65 will put thousands of dollars back in the pockets of Canadians as they become seniors and begin looking forward to their retirement.

This measure will help vulnerable seniors who depend on old age security benefits. Without those benefits, seniors run an even greater risk of living in poverty, and that is unacceptable.

The passage of this bill will also increase the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit by up to \$947 annually for the most vulnerable single seniors starting in July 2016, which will support those seniors who rely almost exclusively on old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits and may therefore be at risk of experiencing financial difficulties.

This enhancement more than doubles the current maximum guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit and represents a 10% increase in the total maximum guaranteed income supplement benefits available to the lowest-income single seniors. This measure represents an investment of over \$670 million per year and will improve the financial security of about 900,000 single seniors across Canada. Over two-thirds of the people who will benefit from this increase are single women.

I will close by saying that we know that the problems we are facing will not be solved overnight or in just one budget. However, we know that good governance does not focus just on today and tomorrow, but also on the years and decades to come. The goal is to build a better life for our children and move forward with optimism, knowing that we can reach our goal. That is why I encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard will have three minutes to finish his speech when the House resumes debate on this motion.

It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1330)

[*English*]

NATIONAL ANTHEM ACT

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.) (via text-to-speech software) moved that Bill C-210, An Act to amend the National Anthem Act (gender), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to be in the chamber today to move second reading of Bill C-210, an act to amend the National Anthem Act. The bill proposes a simple change, in the English version only, of our anthem. It proposes that “True patriot love in all thy sons command” become “True patriot love in all of us command”.

Changing only two words, “thy sons” to “of us”, gives Canada an inclusive anthem that respects what we were and what we have become as a country.

A few colleagues and some Canadians with whom I have spoken have argued that, in their view, our national anthem is sacrosanct. Such arguments are similar to those advanced 51 years ago to stop the adoption of the maple leaf flag to which we are all now attached. As Canadians, we continually test our assumptions, and indeed our symbols, for their suitability. Our Canadian maples have deep roots, but they also have continual new growth, reaching to the sky. Our anthem too can reflect our roots and our growth.

In fact, our anthem has been changed before. Not only are the French and English versions quite different, but the English version has already been modified in the past. The second line of the original English version of 1908 reads, “True patriot love thou dost in us command”. As members can hear, the gender neutral “us” is exactly what we are trying to put back into our anthem. The addition of “us” also includes and recognizes that Canadians come from all around the world, and that also is part of our roots and our growth.

Canada is all of us, not some of us.

In 1913, this line was changed to “True patriot love in all thy sons command”. Many believe the change was related to events leading up to the First World War. It was perhaps assumed that in any major conflict it would only be young men who would carry our national banner and pride into battle, but in fact, both men and women from Canada proudly took part in the First World War. Canadian women served overseas, not as soldiers but in other functions, especially as nurses, and many died doing so. We have commemorated them in Parliament's Hall of Honour but we have not commemorated them in our anthem.

Women also served on the home front. When Canada came of age in the First World War, women and men together made it possible.

[*Translation*]

In 1927, on the 60th anniversary of Confederation, the government authorized the singing of the anthem in schools and at public ceremonies, but it kept the second line of the 1913 version, not the original 1908 gender-neutral version. Other words were changed in 1927, then again in 1980, when Parliament passed legislation concerning the anthem.

The National Anthem Act was introduced, passed, and given royal assent on the same day, June 27, 1980, but the lack of inclusiveness in the English version was noticed and gave rise to debate. A commitment was made to provide time in the following session to study O Canada, in particular the words “thy sons”. Unfortunately, that was not done. We can correct this in 2016.

On the eve of the 150th anniversary of our federation, it is important that one of our most recognized and appreciated national symbols reflect the progress made by our country in terms of gender equality. This progress was slow and hard-won at times, and it marked our country's history. It should be celebrated in our national anthem. In the century since the introduction of “thy sons” in our national anthem, many events have occurred that justify returning to the use of “us”, as in the original version of 1908.

●(1335)

The following are some of these noteworthy changes. Women were first granted the federal right to vote in 1918, by the government of Sir Robert Borden. Canada held its first federal election in which women were allowed to vote and run for office in 1921. It was the year that Agnes Macphail was elected to the House of Commons, making her Canada's first female member of Parliament.

There was the 1929 Persons Case, where the Famous Five succeeded in having women recognized as persons, thereby becoming eligible for appointment to the Senate. A few months

Private Members' Business

later, in 1930, Canada's first female senator, Cairine Wilson, was sworn in.

Less than a minute into 1947, once the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect, the first born Canadian citizen joined us: a young girl named Nicole Cyr-Mazerolle.

The Royal Military College of Canada, in Kingston, started admitting women as students in 1980. There are now 10,000 women in the Canadian Forces, and all positions in the Canadian Forces are open to women today. Men and women are sent everywhere, including into space, and work side by side in the same jobs. Canadian women also serve in other public services such as the Coast Guard and in police services in communities across Canada.

Last but not least, let us not forget Nichola Goddard, who, in 2006, was the first female Canadian soldier to die in combat. She died in Afghanistan while serving her country, and she deserves a place in our anthem as much as any of our boys. Her mother gave her blessing to this symbolic but significant change to our national anthem.

[*English*]

The adoption of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 has led to the gradual and rigorous implementation of equality between men and women, which the charter guarantees. We would be taking a very important symbolic step by ensuring that our anthem respects our charter.

Our anthem should not ignore the increasingly important contribution of 52% of our population. We have come a long way. The strides made by women in our society have been significant and should be fully recognized. Just as important, as revealed by recent events, much remains to be done and Canadians are determined to see realized the dream of true equality between the genders. We are in 2016. Our national anthem is a powerful symbol that reflects and supports the achievement of this ambition.

There are Canadians everywhere in our country in support of the change being advocated with this bill. I believe we are ready to address the issue and to ensure that our national anthem reflects the nation and the people that we really are in this 21st century.

I have received support across the country for my proposal to make this change. If our government does not make this change, ordinary Canadians will simply do it themselves. In fact, that is what is happening. Numerous personalities have expressed their support for the change. Choirs across the country, such as the Toronto Welsh Male Voice Choir, the Vancouver Children's Choir, and the Elektra Women's Choir, have already taken up the new, more inclusive language. I even have the temerity to point out that in this very chamber, on Wednesday, March 9, when I had the great honour of presiding over it, a number of members chose to sing the inclusive version. I notably failed to bring them to order.

Private Members' Business

In fact, the majority of Canadians now support a change to the lyrics of the national anthem to make it gender neutral. Mainstreet Technologies conducted a poll of 5,000 Canadians in April 2015, which showed that 40% strongly approved, 18% somewhat approved of the change, and 24% neither approved nor disapproved. On the negative side, only 6% somewhat disapproved, and 13% strongly disapproved.

In addition, the poll asked:

The original English Anthem uses the word US, the current version uses THY SONS. Which version do you believe is most appropriate?

According to the poll, which was accurate to within 1.35 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, 53% supported the “us” version while 22% supported the “thy sons” version, and 25% said that they did not know.

• (1340)

Quito Maggi, president of Mainstreet Technologies, concluded “With this level of support consistent across Canada, Parliament should look favourably on reverting to the original version of the English *O Canada*. What was once likely changed to increase patriotic sentiment during a time of conflict and war was appropriate then but is no longer reflective of Canadian society today, or representative of over 50% of the Canadian population.”

Canadians now are ready for an inclusive national anthem.

The objective of Bill C-210 is to honour the contribution and sacrifice of our Canadian women, in addition to those of our men, in our national anthem. It is to underscore that all of us, regardless of our gender or our origins, contribute to our unique country.

I look forward to a respectful and non-partisan debate, and eventually to a free vote.

I urge all of my colleagues in this chamber to support my bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has indicated that he will not be taking questions or comments.

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

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier for his dedication and commitment not only to his constituents but also to Parliament and to our great nation. It is a great opportunity for me to say that I first befriended the member for Ottawa—Vanier at the first committee that I was ever charged to be on here in the House of Commons. It was scrutiny of regulations, and he was part of that committee as well. I appreciate his dedication to our country.

These last few months, the member has been a beacon of inspiration to Canadians. He has shown great courage and audacity while carrying out his duties in the House and in his constituency. The mere fact that we are debating his private member's bill today in this House is a shining example of his resolve during such challenging times.

Having said that, I will begin my comments regarding Bill C-210.

Our shared history defines us as Canadians. It has shaped our identity. The symbols, events, achievements, and yes, even the lyrics of our national anthem are what bind us together in Canada. For

generations, through world wars, horrific tragedies, great achievements, citizenship ceremonies, Olympic games, and the beginning of each school day, we have sung our national anthem, as written, with pride and enthusiasm.

The intent of this legislation is well meaning as we want our symbols and institutions to be as inclusive as they possibly can be; however, rewriting the lyrics of our national anthem in the name of political correctness would go too far. I worry, as do many Canadians, that if the words of our national anthem could be changed through a private member's bill, what sort of precedent would we be setting for future changes on other issues of Canadian identity?

Without making light of it, maybe the botanists will be in an uproar about the shape of the maple leaf on our flag and demand that it be changed. Some may be upset that the almighty beaver will not stop chopping down trees, so the National Symbol of Canada Act must be amended to swap out the beaver for an animal that is far less destructive. Yes, for my colleagues or Canadians who may know, the National Symbol of Canada Act recognizes the beaver as the symbol of sovereignty of Canada. While we are at it, perhaps the maple leaf tartan, which is another official national symbol, needs to be redesigned because some people do not like how they look in plaid. I would also be remiss not to point out that the word “God” is also included in our anthem. Should we amend that line to ensure Canadians who are either agnostic or atheist feel included?

In Canada, we pride ourselves on being inclusive. We strive to accept and understand our differences. However, no one I talk to believes this change is necessary. People do not think our national anthem is broken. Every member of this House wants to recognize Canadian identity through our national anthem. However, we should ask ourselves, is rewriting the words to *O Canada* necessary?

Given those lyrics as currently written have inspired millions of people to immigrate to our country; while they pulled the heartstrings of millions after winning the gold medal game and many medals in the Vancouver Olympics; were sung at our children's high-school graduations; and stirred millions of brave men and women to fight and die for our country, do we believe this change is necessary or should we refocus our efforts and priorities on growing the economy? Should we be refocusing our time to improve the quality of life for Canadians?

We should also remember that the last government attempted to start the process of changing the anthem, and after listening to Canadians who thought the idea was offside, dropped the process. Remember that every time legislation has been introduced to change the lyrics, the idea has been defeated in this House for over the last 100 years.

• (1345)

I know my hon. colleague is probably thinking that the 11th time is the charm. While I applaud his tenacity, I will decline his revisionism.

I will also encourage all members of this House to carefully weigh the implications of changing our national anthem after it has served us well for over 100 years. Is it worth opening a Pandora's box of changing the symbols of our great nation in the name of political correctness?

I, for one, will stand up for the current national anthem, lacrosse, and yes, even the majestic beaver, so help me, God.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to serve with my hon. colleague, the member for Ottawa—Vanier, and honoured to be in this House today.

I am sorry that the extremely positive and supportive speech I was about to make has to be interrupted by saying I am ashamed to have heard those words from that member. After 10 years of the former government slashing and burning women's programs, creating national embarrassment across the world, disrespecting indigenous people, disrespecting history and science, and having this fantastic opportunity to remediate the Conservative Party's image, I cannot believe he would say such things. To speakers from his party, I hope that my compelling argument might change the tone for the next series of speakers to follow.

The New Democratic Party, being a strong supporter of gender equality and having a very strong record of concrete action on achieving women's equality, I, along with every New Democrat I know, am very proud and honoured to support this bill before the House today.

• (1350)

It must be said that true action on gender equality in Canada will only be achieved when the government shows true leadership and action on addressing the gender gap, taking real action on universal child care, equal pay for work of equal value, ending violence against women. That said, symbolic changes help as well.

A national symbol's value is tied to its ability to reflect every one of us and bring us together. To help bring us all together on this bill, I am going to give 10 great reasons to vote in favour of the private member's bill from the member for Ottawa—Vanier. Members will be relieved to know that not a single one of them is because it is 2016.

One, this is not such a big change, and I want my Conservative friends to really hear this. Our lyrics used to be gender neutral until they were changed in 1913. Even when Canadian women did not have the right to vote, Canada had gender neutral lyrics in its English language anthem. If this feels like a threatening change, please roll back time to more than a century ago in Canada when we had gender neutral lyrics for our national anthem.

Two, the French lyrics do not need to change, so, as we know in Canada, that makes it simpler. The French version does have gender neutral language, and it has since 1880. Its words have not changed since then. The French are very evolved, very ahead of their time.

Three, the member for Ottawa—Vanier is following in the tradition of fabulous New Democrats Svend Robinson and Libby Davies. This will be the tenth time in 35 years that this Parliament

Private Members' Business

has tried to change the English language lyrics to promote gender equality. Said another way, it is about time.

Four, changing the words will ensure that more than 18 million Canadian women are included in our national anthem. Continuing to sing "thy sons" excludes 52% of our population.

Five, as the member for Ottawa—Vanier has compellingly outlined, many advances have been made in Canada in gender equality since 1913. There was the federal right to vote in 1918, the right to run for office in 1921, the Persons Case in 1929, the admission of women in the army in 1980, and the inclusion of women's equality in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. The member compellingly argues that the bill reflects the evolution of our society.

Six, if we take the "stand on guard for thee" literally and think of soldiers, we have to vote for the bill. This would honour our sisters who are in service on the front lines of our armed forces.

Seven, it sounds good: "true patriot love in all of us command". We all brought Kleenex for this. I am trying to lighten the mood here.

Eight, 58% of Canadians polled last year agreed with this change to the anthem.

Nine, they are in excellent company. High-profile supporters include former Conservative prime minister Kim Campbell, author Margaret Atwood, Conservative Senator Nancy Ruth, former Conservative senator Hugh Segal, former Conservative MP and Liberal Belinda Stronach, and former member of Parliament and Toronto city councillor Olivia Chow. Members are in good company if they vote yes.

Finally, if all of these reasons are not enough, the member for Ottawa—Vanier wants women to have this voice. Let us vote together, and let us include women in our national anthem.

• (1355)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by expressing my admiration for the determination and commitment of the hon. member for presenting his bill today and his commitment to the institution of Parliament, which has been demonstrated by the extraordinary efforts he made to be here to ensure that we would have the opportunity to debate this bill.

Reputedly, it was writer H.G. Wells who said, "No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft", or, as I have heard it said otherwise, "There is no human need as strong as the need to edit someone else's copy". Nowhere is that particular human drive more openly manifested than when it comes to national anthems.

Private Members' Business

Take Germany, for example. The *Deutschlandlied* or Germany song, actually had its beginning as a royal anthem to the Holy Roman Emperor. It then became the anthem for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the words changing each time the emperor changed. Its first appearance as a German anthem was in 1890. At that time, the Prussian royal anthem was still more popular. *Deutschlandlied* became the official anthem in 1922, but in the Nazi era, it was shortened to just the first verse, with its opening *Deutschland über alles*, Germany over everything.

That ultra-nationalist version was, understandably and for obvious reasons, banned initially after World War II. When it was restored in 1952, it was only the more benign third verse, which speaks of unity, justice, and freedom, that was used. Throughout, the version of the anthem that someone had selected had been, actually, a politically charged statement and in many cases, it was taken to mean something entirely different than was the original intention.

A similar desire to change and revise can be found in the case of the Russian anthem, and again politics has driven change. From 1816 to 1833, the *Prayer of Russians*, using the British music to *God Save the King*, served as the anthem. Later, a new anthem began to take its place, *God Save the Tsar*. It kept only the first line of the previous anthem and used an entirely new melody, which most today recognize as the theme representing Russia in Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. Despite its use, idealizing the Napoleonic War of 1812 to 1814, it was actually only introduced in 1833, so not entirely historically accurate, but it did prevail as the national anthem until the February Revolution of 1917 when the tsar was removed from power.

Then, for a period of time, the provisional Russian government used *The Workers' Marseillaise*, a modified version of the French anthem. With the coming of the Bolshevik government, *The Internationale* became the anthem of the day, a new tune and entirely new lyrics, but even that was not enough.

In 1944, a new Soviet anthem was unveiled. It worked until 1953 when, with the death of the brutal dictator Stalin, its glowing references to him were no longer politically vogue, so for years the melody was played with no lyrics. In 1977, a new set of lyrics was introduced. Stalin was gone and so were references to the great war. Lenin, however, remained and the triumph and immortal ideals of communism now figured large.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the *Patriotic Song* of Glinka was adopted as the new anthem for the now post-Soviet Russian state. The Glinka melody went without lyrics until 1999, when it finally gained words, which evoked the tsarist past, speaking of Mother Russia and the two-headed eagle. Its life and that of another competing set of lyrics was brief.

After Putin took power the next year, in 2000, he restored the old Soviet anthem's music, but, of course, once again, a lyrical rewrite was required; in fact, it was directed by Putin. Lenin and the Communist Party were not really in. A set of lyrics was settled by committee, but even it was changed before Putin set the new words in law, losing its references to tsarist era symbols. Not surprisingly, a decade later, a majority of Russians could still not recall the first line of the recently revised version of the national anthem.

In Canada, we actually also have a history of editing and changing national anthems. It is a recurring theme.

At this time I will take the opportunity to advise the House and make everyone aware that the Conservative Party has taken a position on this bill that it will be a free vote. Everyone will be able to vote their conscience, which I think is, as the hon. member has said in proposing this bill, the appropriate way to approach this matter.

In the case of the Canadian anthem changes, politics, too, has played a part. *God Save the Queen* was played for many years in pre- and post-Confederation Canada.

● (1400)

This reflected the fact of Canada as a British colony, and after Confederation, the fact that Queen Victoria was the head of state of our new country of Canada. Some, however, felt the need for a uniquely Canadian song as a Canadian anthem.

In the year of Confederation, 1867, Alexander Muir composed *The Maple Leaf Forever*. It was said to have been inspired by a silver maple tree in his neighbourhood in east end Toronto. In fact, beside you, Mr. Speaker, is a flag stand that has been carved from that very tree, which was felled by a storm in July 2013. However, there is some debate, I should confess, about whether the Orange lodge had the right tree when it erected the plaque there in 1958.

While, for many, *The Maple Leaf Forever* served as the national anthem, some criticized the anthem. They said that its words focusing on Wolfe's victory at Quebec and referencing the thistle, shamrock, and rose were too Anglocentric. Muir revised the words to include the lily, symbolizing Canada's French roots.

Although the song enjoyed popularity in the past, it has faded over time, despite many rewrites of the lyrics that sought to placate critics and salvage this undoubtedly historically significant song. Today, it is principally heard when the Toronto Maple Leafs skate onto the ice before home games. Sadly, they have experienced a similar decline in their fortunes.

Another parallel effort to give Canada a national anthem of its own was more successful. Originally commissioned by the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste to provide a patriotic Canadian song in French, it had a tune composed by Calixa Lavallée and lyrics by Adolphe-Basile Routhier. It was first performed on June 24, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, in 1880. It was *O Canada*, French lyrics only.

It really began to gain momentum when it was played for the visit of the future King George V, the Duke of Cornwall, in 1901. In the years that followed, competing efforts to write English lyrics took place, but a 1908 version by Montreal lawyer Robert Stanley Weir began to win hearts and minds. His version is close to the one members would recognize today, but even that would change in his own hands between the 1908 and the 1927 version, which is what I sang as a child.

Parliamentary efforts to make it official moved forward in steps from 1964, but only in 1980 would it officially become the national anthem, and through that time, more lyric changes took place. It is significant that one of the causes of delay was resistance by Weir's family to further changes to the lyrics. There have been no word changes since the 1980 law that made the anthem official.

A proposal to change the words was raised by the previous government, in which I served, in a throne speech in 2010. The public response was strong, and it was negative. Those of us who were part of the government experienced that reaction. Even though the proposal would restore an original Weir lyric, Canadians wanted no changes. Even Weir's grandson weighed in, opposing any change.

What Canadians were telling us is important, which is that symbols matter. Those things we use to create our national identity matter. They were saying that, in a world of rapid change, they want to hang on to things that matter to them. They want to continue to believe that the things that made Canada a great country remain great things. They were saying that, in a lifetime of singing the national anthem, they were doing so with pride for their country. They do not want everyone poring over the national symbols, which make us Canadian, and looking for reasons to change them. Canadians want to be able to hang on to their heritage.

It is a motivation and sentiment that I respect. It is a perspective that I believe we should value. In a world where change moves faster and faster, respecting the history of the symbols, the icons, and the stories that have made us who we are is actually a good idea. That is why I am listening to those who told our government in 2010 to leave their national anthem alone; it belongs to Canadians now.

• (1405)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the member for York—Simcoe for that brief and very good lesson on the national anthem. I would also like to thank the member for Ottawa—Vanier for appearing here today in the House of Commons. It is phenomenal to see him here, and I am very grateful that he was here to introduce his bill.

Today I stand in support of our national anthem, *O Canada*, in its current form, the form that was adopted in 1980 when it became our national anthem.

Back in January when I went on record with local media sources and stated that I would not support the bill to amend our national anthem, within my own community, with a few exceptions, men and women alike from a variety of ages and groups fully supported my view on not changing the anthem.

Sarah McClure wrote, "Thank you for standing up against changing our national anthem". Tracey Hare wrote, "Thank you Karen". Mary Lou Stanley of St. Thomas wrote, "Thanks Karen. I

Private Members' Business

believe there are more important issues for women than words in a song". Doris Baughman said, "Thank you. We should not have to change anything. You can't please everyone." Joan Wakeling said, "It is great the way it is. Thanks for your stand on this issue." Mackenzie Murray Cameron Smith said, "What about the other verses? If you are changing the song's lyrics then you have to change the 3rd verse as well to be gender neutral: O Canada, beneath the shining skies, may stalwart sons and gentle maidens rise...". Tina Dunn said, "That's wonderful. Thank you Karen L. Vecchio. We need more politicians who will stand up for our heritage".

On the page from the local radio station there were 37 shares and thousands of likes to follow. These are my constituents, and I am here as their elected official.

Now, when we move to national media, many of the same types of support exist, but for those who did not agree with me, there was a whole new discussion. These discussions become much more directed and included the following: Spider Queen, "I am disgusted by Vecchio's response"; and Duckie, "Wake up and get with the 21st century"; but finally, "The Cons could always be counted on to vote against anything that would in the smallest way recognize Canadian women as equal."

Although I scoured the Internet last night, I could not find the initial comments that were drawn from this original discussion, but let us just say that, if people are so worried about the way they are treating women and want to change the national anthem, the words and slanders that they threw my way would be totally unacceptable. It is quite funny that women's rights mean one thing until you disagree and stand up for a different opinion.

I am a strong woman and a leader within my community. I stand with pride when I sing the national anthem, but by no means am I offended by the national anthem. People in support of keeping the national anthem the way it is will comment that the word "son" can have many different uses including a possessive to God and so forth. I am not going to attempt to say that the word "son" does not mean male, but my true concern is the following and something summed up very well.

In *Maclean's* magazine on October 9, 2013, regarding a campaign to make our national anthem gender neutral, the following was written by Emma Teital and states:

Key to the campaign is the argument that "the lyrics of *O Canada* now exclude more than 50 per cent of our population while acting as the underlying foundation of our nation." But the underlying foundation of our nation is not a song kids mumble after the morning bell and before hockey games. The foundation of our nation—the thing that makes us us—is our Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, both of which protect the rights of women and minorities.

We see in our own history that there are have been many attempts to change *O Canada*, including June 1990 when Toronto City Council voted in favour of recommending to the federal government that the wording, "our home and native land" be changed to "our home and cherished land" to be more inclusive of non-native-born Canadians, and that the phrase, "in all thy sons command" be changed to "in all of us command" to bring it closer to the original, "thou dost in us command", and be more gender inclusive.

The same occurred in 2002 when a Senator introduced a bill that "in all thy sons command" be changed to "in all of us command".

Private Members' Business

Several groups criticized the reference to God in the English version and to Catholicism in the French version as being anti-secular, and in 2010, the Speech from the Throne indicated it would review the original gender-neutral wording of the national anthem. Public outcry against changing the national anthem, including the same in the riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London saw the plans reversed.

The government and all members of Parliament in the House, support women.

• (1410)

We are all committed to seeing a better life and better opportunities for mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and granddaughters, but there is much more that we can do. In the status of women committee, we are currently studying gender-based analysis and will be returning in the fall for a full and in-depth study on violence against women.

Although I did not support the bill put forward by the NDP member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, who is here today, because I did not feel it was necessary to create a new committee, as it should have been done under the status of women committee in my view, this government and all parties are studying pay equity. The previous government put forward many initiatives for women also, including the International Day of the Girl, as well as opportunities for businesswomen and entrepreneurs.

However, I go back to the anthem.

As I said, changing the anthem would open up Pandora's box. The lyrics to our national anthem are a great source of pride for Canadians and a symbol for all Canadians. Once we open up this discussion to amend the national anthem to make it gender equal, as some may say, we also open it up to a variety of other changes, including the removal of religious words and words referring to indigenous people.

We should be supporting all Canadians: men and women, seniors and our youth, Christians and Jews, and so on, but this is a discussion about changing part of our Canadian heritage. This is an empty gesture and we should be focusing on what is real and tangible for Canadians. This gesture is about being politically correct, and not truly creating new opportunities for women.

As I said and as it was indicated in *Maclean's* magazine, our national anthem is not perfect but it is part of our national heritage. We all stand with pride and sing our national anthem and I do so as a woman. Persons of different faith backgrounds stand and sing our national anthem. New immigrants taking their oath to Canada at citizenship ceremonies stand up and sing our national anthem, and all with great pride. This is our national anthem.

If we are really trying to achieve equality, social media masters would not be seeking to discredit me just because I stand on my beliefs and those of my constituents, and slander my integrity. We have all heard that actions speak louder than words, so I would suggest that we start acting to support all women, and not just when our views are the same.

I look forward to this rigorous debate and I support the views of all colleagues on all sides of the House regardless of their personal views.

I do not support this legislation but I do support Canadians and I support our national anthem in its current form. As one of the greatest women in Canadian history, my mother, said, "Karen, keep the national anthem as is."

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, join my colleagues in commending our colleague across the way for his tenacity and his courage, and for bringing the bill forward.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-210, an act to amend the National Anthem Act with respect to gender. It was not that long ago that we were here debating the same legislation in the past Parliament with Bill C-624. Neither the purpose of Bill C-210 nor the means of doing so have changed since last year, which is to make our national anthem, in the eyes of the legislation's proponents, more gender neutral. The bill would achieve this by amending the phrase "True patriot love in all thy sons command" to "True patriot love in all of us command", as has already been noted.

Our anthem is not a direct translation between French and English. In fact, it is not even a close translation. Therefore, the bill would not affect the French version of the anthem.

As all of us are now aware, the verses of *O Canada* have remained unchanged since the song was adopted as Canada's official anthem in 1980. As with anything, there was not universal satisfaction at the adoption of the anthem and there have been those who have wanted to see it changed for various reasons over the past 36 years.

As I mentioned, Parliament has been down this road before. Since 1980, there have been 10 private member's bills introduced in Parliament to change the second line of the English version of the anthem, for both personal and technical reasons. I believe that all these attempts have failed by and large because Canadians do have a strong attachment to our anthem as it is and Parliament has resisted changing the anthem or even holding lengthy debates on the future of the anthem for that reason. Ask anyone and they will tell you of the great sense of pride in our country they feel upon singing or hearing our anthem.

We need to remember that Canada has more than one symbol, and they are as diverse as our history. They include the coat of arms, our motto, the national flag, our official colours, the maple tree, the beaver, the national horse, our national sports, the tartan, and of course, our national anthem. Thankfully, Canadians do care about our symbols. Our national symbols, chosen over time, are the threads that weave together our history as Canadians. Taken together, they define what it means to be Canadian and are an expression of our national identity.

Of all Canada's symbols, the anthem is the most prominent and the most poignant. All of us can remember the Vancouver Olympics when Canadians from coast to coast to coast would break out and proudly and loudly sing our national anthem. We watched with pride and anticipation every time a Canadian athlete won a gold medal, to hear our anthem played.

Private Members' Business

While the members who support this legislation say that it is a minor reform, when it comes to our symbols, there is no such thing.

Any time Parliament debates our national symbols, and our anthem is very much a symbol of our country, Canadians express a vested interest in the outcome. Most Canadians would not be able to offer up a 10-page thesis on why they like the anthem as is. They would not be able to offer up a long explanation for why they would oppose a change. However, most Canadians know intuitively that they want the anthem to remain the same.

Every time this issue is raised and debated in the chamber, I receive a flood of correspondence and phone calls from constituents who are overwhelmingly against this change. Public opinion surveys have backed up this anecdotal evidence. A 2013 study by Forum Research found that 65% of Canadians opposed the change; only 25% supported the change, and 10% had no opinion at all on the issue.

I know that the legislation's proponents would argue that there are a number of prominent Canadians who support this change and have spoken passionately about it. Quite honestly and with respect, in debates of this nature it is not one's prominence, but rather one's personhood that matters.

Proponents of this change would also argue that the anthem is somehow insulting to women and therefore should be changed. With respect to all members, I do not believe the anthem is sexist, and any student of history knows this.

• (1415)

I would like to take this opportunity to expand on that.

The original line in the English anthem was “thou dost in us command”. This line was changed by Robert Stanley Weir in 1914 to “in all thy sons command”, as an homage to Canada's young men who were going to war. This changed reflected the reality of the appalling toll of young male lives as the price paid for their “true patriot love”.

The reference to “thy sons” is the military reference to the Great War. It is a proud reference to Canada's history and the first time that Canada fought as an independent nation, and won, at Vimy Ridge.

When Weir made this now famous change to the anthem, he was not thinking about gender equality. He was thinking about the Great War and the heavy cost that young Canadian men would bear. Changing this verse would fundamentally change Robert Stanley Weir's original intent when he made this change from his 1908 version. It would remove this incredibly powerful reference to our country's history that forms the backbone of our anthem.

I would also posit that the anthem is well liked today for exactly this reference. Canada took its rightful place on the world stage during the First World War, and it is entirely appropriate for our anthem to note this achievement.

In conclusion, I will not be supporting this proposed legislation, for two reasons. First, I have yet to see any evidence that the majority of Canadians want to see this change. Second, I do not believe that making the anthem gender neutral would make our

anthem better, more inclusive, or more representative of Canadians. If anything, it would do the contrary.

All Canadians, regardless of gender, are equally proud of our soldiers' accomplishments in the First World War and understand that “thy sons” is a reference to the bravery that our soldiers displayed during a specific time in our history.

Women serve with distinction in our Canadian Forces. However, this phrase in our national anthem is a historical symbol of Canada coming of age during this conflict, and should remain so.

It is my sincere hope that respect for our past, together with a strong desire to preserve our history, will ensure that any future symbols that may be chosen to acknowledge important events will also stand the test of time.

• (1420)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me add my words of gratitude to the member for Ottawa—Vanier for many years of service to the House, but especially, for the stamina and strength that he showed today by coming here to Parliament. I consider him a friend. I consider him a true colleague. I have watched his hard work here in the House. I also have the honour of living, in my secondary residence, in the area the member for Ottawa—Vanier represents and I can tell members that judging by the communication that he carries on with his constituents, he works hard on their behalf each and every day.

I am sure that every one of my colleagues in the House joins with my wife and I in our daily prayers for strength and stamina for my colleague's family and, especially, for my colleague going through this very difficult challenge.

I am proud, today, to speak in the House about an issue that is very important to me. It is in this very place, every Wednesday, that we, as members of Parliament, sing our national anthem together. We do so united as Canadians, without regard for the political, regional, or other differences that sometimes divide us in this place.

Similarly, across this great country, in hockey arenas, classrooms, community centres, and memorial parks, the national anthem brings Canadians together. I am sure all my colleagues, on Canada Day, have many opportunities to join in communities across their ridings and, if not lead in the singing of the national anthem, at least join with their constituents in the singing of the national anthem. What a joy it is for us, as members, to be able to join our constituents, especially on Canada Day, as we celebrate.

O Canada is not just our national anthem. It represents our common historical, emotional, and spiritual heritage as a country and as a people. It is as important as the maple leaf, the beaver, the tartan, and other symbols that represent Canada and contribute to our national identity. When the national anthem is sung, it evokes passionate emotions of patriotic fervour, solemn remembrance, and enthusiastic national pride in the hearts of all who hear it.

Private Members' Business

Initially, many Canadians sang *God Save the King* and *The Maple Leaf Forever* as the de facto national anthems of Canada. In fact, many of my colleagues in the House probably stood in elementary school and sang, as the national anthem, *God Save the Queen*.

However, as a result of our desire for an anthem that was more applicable for French Canadians, Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier and Calixa Lavallée were commissioned to write *O Canada* in 1880. This anthem gradually grew in popularity across Canada and over the course of the early 20th century.

In 1927, it was officially published for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation and began to be sung in schools and at public functions. Later, in 1967, a special joint committee of Parliament tasked with studying *O Canada* would recommend that it be adopted as the country's national anthem. Following further deliberation and study by Parliament, *O Canada* was proclaimed as the country's official national anthem in 1980.

The development of *O Canada* is a reflection of the creativity and character of Canadians who crafted and adopted an anthem suitable for a country as extraordinary and diverse as Canada. However, it would be both inaccurate and disrespectful to consider the national anthem to be merely a banal song, hymn, needless formality, or meaningless tradition. Rather, the national anthem is a significant and momentous aspect of Canadian identity, and when sung, it is as evocative as it is impressive.

There are numerous examples of the importance of the anthem in so many facets of Canadian life. For instance, the national anthem is sung with enthusiasm by new Canadians upon receiving their citizenship.

Again, I need to just divert for a moment to consider the fact that many of us in this room have the privilege and honour of joining with our new Canadian citizens as they stand to take the oath of Canadian citizenship. Then, at the end of that ceremony, we sing, together, *O Canada*. For many of them, it is the very first time they will sing it, and for all of them, they sing it as a Canadian citizen and it is an incredibly emotional time.

It is sung by our athletes when representing this country on the world stage and by our military when serving their country, both at home and abroad.

•(1425)

Indeed, the national anthem is even sung by those who are not Canadians, as we saw following the terrorist attack here in Ottawa two years ago. At that difficult time, our neighbours in the United States came together and sang *O Canada* before a hockey game between two American teams to show their support for our country amidst tragedy.

Of course, the national anthem is sung when we gather to remember the sacrifices of the men and women who have given their lives in order to secure the freedom and prosperity of their fellow Canadians. Again reflecting on the many opportunities I have had to join with Legion members at ceremonial events across my riding, it is just an honour to be able to join them in singing *O Canada* and recognize the sacrifice they made to allow us to be able to sing this great song together.

However, since the adoption of *O Canada* as the official national anthem in 1980, it has remained unchanged. Given the great symbolic significance of the national anthem, modifying it or changing it in any way is a matter that concerns not only this House but the entire country as a whole. It is important to note there remains substantial opposition among Canadians to any changes to the national anthem. A definitive study conducted by Forum Research in 2013 indicated that over 65% of Canadians, both men and women alike, believed the national anthem should not be changed. It is for this reason that every previous attempt to modify the national anthem has been unsuccessful. There simply has not been significant public support for any sort of alteration.

When Canadians gather to sing the national anthem together, they do so in part to demonstrate their commonality and unity as citizens of this great country. Furthermore, it should be noted that over 78% of Canadians see the national anthem as it exists as a source of great pride. As such, any change could seriously affect the role of the national anthem as a source of pride and unity among Canadians. For instance, we can reflect on the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games when all Canadians came together in a remarkable display of national pride and unity. All across Canada, Canadians were able to cheer on the brilliant exploits of their athletes, and the national anthem served to inspire and unite us during this grand event.

Next year, we will continue to demonstrate our national pride when we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation and the remarkable development of our country since that time. When we are commemorating this significant milestone in the history of our country, our national anthem will feature prominently as a symbol of our country and an expression of our national unity. On such occasions, the national anthem serves as a symbol that continues to bring Canadians together and an important aspect of what makes us Canadian. Moreover, as we reflect on the great achievements of our country and the sacrifices those achievements have required, the importance of our national anthem remains evident.

In closing, I must remind members of this House to consider the importance of the national anthem of Canada as a symbol of national identity, a source of national unity, and a reason for national pride. Most of all, it is my hope that regardless of the outcome of this debate, each and every Canadian will continue to proudly sing the national anthem with a glowing heart. I most certainly will.

While I am not supporting this bill, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier, and that respect and admiration will continue and will not change regardless of the outcome of the vote on Bill C-210.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. members for their speeches. I would like to seek, if it is the will of this House, unanimous consent to continue the discussion on this bill at this time, beyond the ordinary hours of this House.

•(1430)

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to continue the debate past the ordinary hour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sensing that there is any consent for that.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

It being 2:30 p.m., this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Friday, May 6, 2016

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Budget Implementation Act, 2016, No. 1

| | |
|--|------|
| Bill C-15. Second reading | 2991 |
| Mr. Graham | 2991 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 2991 |
| Ms. Gladu | 2991 |
| Mr. Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) .. | 2992 |
| Mr. Schmale | 2992 |
| Mr. MacKinnon | 2994 |
| Ms. Gladu | 2994 |
| Mr. Strahl | 2994 |
| Mr. Hardie | 2996 |
| Mr. Zimmer | 2996 |
| Mr. Bossio | 2996 |
| Ms. Gladu | 2998 |
| Mr. Stetski | 2998 |
| Mr. McGuinty | 2998 |

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Scottish National Party

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Mr. Ste-Marie | 2999 |
|---------------------|------|

Félix Bertrand

| | |
|--|------|
| Mr. Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) | 2999 |
|--|------|

Laval University

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Mr. Paul-Hus | 2999 |
|--------------------|------|

Hon. Cairine Wilson

| | |
|------------------|------|
| Mr. Leslie | 3000 |
|------------------|------|

Human Rights

| | |
|----------------------|------|
| Ms. Laverdière | 3000 |
|----------------------|------|

Réjean Lafrenière

| | |
|----------------|------|
| Mr. Amos | 3000 |
|----------------|------|

Agriculture

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Mr. Viersen | 3000 |
|-------------------|------|

Al Saikali

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Mr. McGuinty | 3000 |
|--------------------|------|

Kanata North Community Recognition Awards

| | |
|----------------------|------|
| Mrs. McCrimmon | 3001 |
|----------------------|------|

Lotbinière Caregivers' Association

| | |
|------------------|------|
| Mr. Gourde | 3001 |
|------------------|------|

International Child Abduction

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Mr. Alghabra | 3001 |
|--------------------|------|

Fort McMurray Fire

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Ms. Hutchings | 3001 |
|---------------------|------|

Central Okanagan Rotary Food Drive

| | |
|-----------------|------|
| Mr. Albas | 3001 |
|-----------------|------|

Science Odyssey

| | |
|-----------------|------|
| Mr. Beech | 3002 |
|-----------------|------|

Transportation of Propane

| | |
|--|------|
| Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | 3002 |
|--|------|

War Heroes from Canada

| | |
|----------------|------|
| Mr. Reid | 3002 |
|----------------|------|

Mental Health Week

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Mr. Ferguson | 3002 |
|--------------------|------|

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ethics

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Mr. Scheer | 3003 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3003 |
| Mr. Scheer | 3003 |
| Mr. Brison | 3003 |
| Mr. Scheer | 3003 |
| Mr. Brison | 3003 |
| Ms. Bergen | 3003 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3003 |
| Ms. Bergen | 3003 |
| Mr. Brison | 3003 |

Canada Post

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Mr. Dubé | 3004 |
| Ms. Alleslev | 3004 |
| Mr. Dubé | 3004 |
| Ms. Alleslev | 3004 |

Poverty

| | |
|------------------|------|
| Ms. Ashton | 3004 |
| Mr. Brison | 3004 |

Taxation

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Ashton | 3004 |
| Mrs. Lebouthillier | 3004 |

Ethics

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Mr. Brassard | 3005 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3005 |
| Mr. Brassard | 3005 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3005 |
| Mr. Gourde | 3005 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3005 |
| Mr. Gourde | 3005 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3005 |
| Mr. Godin | 3005 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3006 |
| Mr. Godin | 3006 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3006 |

Canada Revenue Agency

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Mr. Caron | 3006 |
| Mrs. Lebouthillier | 3006 |
| Mr. Rankin | 3006 |
| Mrs. Lebouthillier | 3006 |

National Defence

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| Mr. Paul-Hus | 3006 |
|--------------------|------|

| | |
|--|------|
| Mr. McKay | 3007 |
| Mr. Paul-Hus | 3007 |
| Mr. McKay | 3007 |
| Foreign Affairs | |
| Mr. Sweet | 3007 |
| Mr. Alghabra | 3007 |
| Mr. Genuis | 3007 |
| Mr. Alghabra | 3007 |
| Search and Rescue | |
| Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | 3007 |
| Mr. Tootoo | 3007 |
| Employment Insurance | |
| Mr. Weir | 3008 |
| Mr. Cuzner | 3008 |
| Access to Information | |
| Mr. Peterson | 3008 |
| Mr. Brison | 3008 |
| Health | |
| Ms. Gladu | 3008 |
| Ms. Khera | 3008 |
| Ms. Gladu | 3008 |
| Ms. Khera | 3008 |
| Marijuana | |
| Mr. Albrecht | 3008 |
| Mr. Blair | 3008 |
| Mr. Albrecht | 3009 |
| Mr. Blair | 3009 |
| The Environment | |
| Ms. Malcolmson | 3009 |
| Mr. Tootoo | 3009 |
| Child Care | |
| Ms. Laverdière | 3009 |
| Mr. Duclos | 3009 |
| Health | |
| Mr. Carrie | 3009 |
| Ms. Khera | 3009 |
| Indigenous Affairs | |
| Mr. Viersen | 3010 |
| Ms. Bennett | 3010 |
| Employment | |
| Mr. Hoback | 3010 |
| Ms. Rudd | 3010 |
| Fort McMurray | |
| Mr. Ellis | 3010 |
| Mr. Duclos | 3010 |
| Intergovernmental Relations | |
| Mr. Albas | 3010 |
| Mr. Fergus | 3010 |
| Innovation, Science, and Economic Development | |
| Mr. Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs) | 3010 |
| Mr. Fergus | 3010 |

| | |
|---------------------------|------|
| Taxation | |
| Mr. Waugh | 3011 |
| Ms. Hutchings | 3011 |
| Official Languages | |
| Mr. Beaulieu | 3011 |
| Ms. Bibeau | 3011 |
| Canadian Heritage | |
| Ms. Pauzé | 3011 |
| Ms. Bibeau | 3011 |
| Securities | |
| Mr. Ste-Marie | 3011 |
| Mr. Duclos | 3011 |

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

| | |
|---|------|
| Government Response to Petitions | |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3012 |
| The Environment | |
| Ms. McKenna | 3012 |
| Canada Post | |
| Ms. Alleslev | 3012 |
| Committees of the House | |
| Status of Women | |
| Ms. Gladu | 3012 |
| Fisheries and Oceans | |
| Mr. Simms | 3012 |
| Petitions | |
| Falun Gong | |
| Mr. Strahl | 3012 |
| Justice | |
| Mr. Strahl | 3012 |
| Iran | |
| Mr. Genuis | 3012 |
| Palliative Care | |
| Mr. Albrecht | 3012 |
| Physician-Assisted Dying | |
| Mr. Albrecht | 3012 |
| Justice | |
| Mr. Viersen | 3012 |
| Physician-Assisted Dying | |
| Ms. Gladu | 3012 |
| Canadian Coast Guard | |
| Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | 3013 |
| Justice | |
| Mr. Van Kesteren | 3013 |
| Animal Welfare | |
| Mr. Stetski | 3013 |
| Questions Passed as Orders for Returns | |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3013 |
| Committees of the House | |
| Industry, Science and Technology | |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3013 |
| Motion | 3013 |
| (Motion agreed to) | 3013 |

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Budget Implementation Act, 2016, No. 1

| | |
|--|------|
| Bill C-15. Second reading | 3013 |
| Mr. McGuinty | 3013 |
| Ms. Leitch | 3014 |
| Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | 3014 |
| Mr. Lamoureux | 3015 |
| Ms. Leitch | 3015 |
| Mr. Graham | 3016 |
| Mr. Dubé | 3016 |
| Mr. Hardie | 3016 |
| Mr. Peterson | 3017 |
| Mr. Van Loan | 3018 |
| Mr. Johns | 3018 |
| Ms. Alleslev | 3019 |
| Ms. Gladu | 3020 |
| Mr. Johns | 3020 |

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Mr. Ouellette | 3020 |
| Mr. Clarke | 3021 |
| Mr. Ouellette | 3022 |
| Ms. Sansoucy | 3023 |
| Mr. Albrecht | 3023 |
| Mr. Cormier | 3023 |

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

National Anthem Act

| | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Bélanger | 3024 |
| Bill C-210. Second reading | 3024 |
| Mr. Maguire | 3026 |
| Ms. Malcolmson | 3027 |
| Mr. Van Loan | 3027 |
| Mrs. Vecchio | 3029 |
| Mrs. Block | 3030 |
| Mr. Albrecht | 3031 |

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