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(HANSARD)

Friday, October 7, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, October 7, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1005)
[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from September 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, an Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate.

As there are no further speakers, is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the recorded division stands deferred until

Monday, October 17, 2016, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the recorded division on the amendment to the motion for third reading of Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act be further deferred until the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions on Tuesday, October 18, 2016.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We do not have unanimous consent, I am afraid.

We will put it forward again, then. I think we have had some change of hearts here.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe we have unanimous consent.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

* * *

•(1010)

SALARIES ACT

Hon. Stéphane Dion (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government House leader, I stand today in order to begin second reading debate on Bill C-24, which would amend the Salaries Act and formalize the equality of all ministers in this ministry to better reflect the operating reality in the current cabinet since its swearing-in last November. This would in fact formalize that.

These changes to the Salaries Act would fulfill the commitment made by the Prime Minister last November when he said he would introduce legislation to formalize the equal status of his whole ministerial team. From the beginning, the Prime Minister has created a ministry in which every single minister around the cabinet table has an equal voice, an equal capacity to perform his or her duties and functions, and leading roles to deliver on the important priorities of this government. The ministers are equally accountable as well, individually and collectively, to the Prime Minister and to Parliament for the performance of their duties.

The ministers have also been receiving the same salary since day one. However, without legislative change, it is not possible to accurately reflect this parity among ministers because the list of ministerial positions in the Salaries Act is fixed and inflexible. While that list may have served previous administrations well, it needs to be updated to reflect the priorities of this government. It needs to be modernized to make it a more flexible and adaptable tool for the design of future ministries. This is nothing new. Indeed, the Salaries Act was amended in 2005, 2012, and 2013 so as to reflect the reality of ministries at those times. As time goes by, realities change and new priorities emerge, and the government has the responsibility to ensure it has the ability to respond adequately.

Let me mention for members of the House that the Salaries Act authorized payment out of the consolidated revenue fund for ministers' salaries to individuals who have been appointed to ministerial positions listed in the act. The current ministry has 30 ministers, including the Prime Minister. However, five of these ministerial positions are not listed in the Salaries Act, namely the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women.

Because the Salaries Act could not accommodate those important priorities of this government, the five ministers had to be appointed pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act, and their legal title is minister of state. Many observers thought that the Prime Minister had created a two-tiered cabinet comprised of senior and junior ministers. Let me assure the House that, as one of those ministers of state in her capacity as Minister of Small Business and Tourism, our current House leader, just like all ministers in the Prime Minister's cabinet, from day one has had full standing and authority. The spirit and intent, and indeed the wording of the oath of office taken by each and every minister, conferred an equal status. Even though some positions are not listed in the Salaries Act, it is a team of equals. It has been well understood among all cabinet colleagues that the use of minister of state provisions was a temporary measure

that would be addressed by legislation. The legislation is indeed before us today.

Before I turn to Bill C-24 to outline the important proposed amendments it contains, I would like to mention that the bill would not affect the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. Appointing ministers of state pursuant to the act will remain an option should the Prime Minister wish to exercise it.

Now I would like to give the House an overview of the bill. There are essentially two components to the bill: adjustments to the list of ministerial positions in the Salaries Act, and the creation of a framework to support certain ministers in the carrying out of their responsibilities.

I will begin with the adjustments of these positions. Bill C-24 would adjust the list in three ways. First it would add eight ministerial positions to the Salaries Act. Five of those positions are already filled by ministers and would replace the current minister of state appointments.

● (1015)

Again, those five positions are the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.), the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women.

The other three positions would be untitled and are not filled in the current ministry. These flexible positions could be used and titled by a prime minister at his or her discretion, in response to future priorities and emerging challenges and opportunities. In this way, the bill would not simply amend the Salaries Act to reflect the current ministry, it would also look to the future. Prime ministers would have the flexibility to adapt their ministries to the priorities of their time.

I want to stress that the increase in possible ministerial positions in this bill does not mean that the cabinet would expand. In fact, we now have a cabinet of 30 full ministers, including the Prime Minister, though the Salaries Act would allow for a cabinet of up to 35. Second, the bill would remove the titles related to the six regional development positions in the Salaries Act.

I want to emphasize that this would not impact in any way the regional development agencies, nor would it eliminate the need for ministerial oversight of them. It is quite the opposite. The positions would continue to be filled by a minister to oversee the regional development agencies and fulfill the statutory responsibilities related to them. This could be done, for example, by cross-appointing Salaries Act ministers to these positions.

My hon. colleague, the member for Mississauga—Malton and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, is the responsible minister for all of the regional agencies. Regional development is and remains a major priority of our government to help grow our economy, strengthen the middle class, and help those who are working so hard to join it.

Government Orders

To recap, Bill C-24 would spell out five titled positions, which are already occupied by individuals who are paid a ministerial salary. It would create three new untitled positions and remove six positions. The maximum number of ministerial positions that could be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund would be capped at 37, including the prime minister. This represents an increase of two positions over the current 35.

The final adjustment to the list of ministerial positions is a housekeeping matter. The bill would change the title of the minister of infrastructure, communities and intergovernmental affairs to the minister of infrastructure and communities. The minister of infrastructure and communities has no overall responsibility for federal-provincial-territorial relations. The Prime Minister has assumed responsibilities for intergovernmental affairs. Removing that phrase from the minister of infrastructure and communities title better reflects the responsibilities of the position in order to avoid confusion. Those are adjustments that Bill C-24 would make to the list of ministers.

Now I would like to briefly explain the framework that Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act to provide support to ministers appointed to any of the new positions.

The bill would authorize the Governor in Council to designate departments to provide support to any of the new Salaries Act ministers in the carrying out of their responsibilities. The Governor in Council would have the flexibility to designate the department to provide support to a minister with respect to some or all of the ministers' responsibilities.

The Governor in Council would also be able to designate more than one department to provide support to a minister while maintaining clarity with respect to which departments support the ministers for which matters. The bill would authorize the ministers to use services, facilities, and employees of the department or departments who have been designated to support them.

● (1020)

The framework means that no new departments need to be created to support these ministers. This departmental support authority is an important element of the bill. I would like to explain why with a concrete example, that of the House leader.

In her role as Minister of Small Business and Tourism, she is currently appointed pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. The act authorizes her, in carrying out her small business and tourism responsibilities, to use the departmental services, facilities, and employees of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, the portfolio to which she is attached.

Once the position moves to the Salaries Act, the automatic link to the department through the Ministries and Ministers of State Act will not be available. Bill C-24 would authorize the Governor in Council to essentially re-establish that particular link.

In her case, of course, she is both the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, which is already a Salaries Act position, and the Minister of Small Business and Tourism. Under Bill C-24, the Governor in Council would be able to designate the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development to continue to support her in relation to her small business and tourism

responsibilities. As is the case now, she would be supported by other public servants with respect to her government House leader responsibilities.

The bill would amend the Salaries Act to authorize ministers whose departments are designated to support any of the new positions, if occupied, to delegate their financial and procurement authorities to the new ministers to exercise and be accountable for within their areas of responsibility. Let me state again that this bill would enable these new ministerial positions, if occupied, to be supported by an existing department. No new departments would need to be established.

Finally, I would like to address the question of costs associated with Bill C-24. This bill would not increase the cost of the current ministry. The five ministers currently appointed as ministers of state receive the same salary as their cabinet colleagues and have office budgets that match their responsibilities. This will not change under the bill before us. What this bill simply does is enshrine in law what is current practice within the ministry.

To conclude, since the cabinet was sworn in last November, all ministers have taken their places as equals at the cabinet table. It is unfortunate that the statutory differences between Salaries Act ministers and the Ministries and Ministers of State Act ministers created for some an incorrect perception that some had a lesser status.

By bringing this entire cabinet under the Salaries Act, we are sending a powerful signal that there are no second-tier ministers in this government. Each and every minister's voice is being heard. They all have equal authority. As a result of this bill, the equality that is felt at the cabinet table will also be reflected in the law. Such a simple bill can carry a powerful message.

For the purpose of the business of this House, this is indeed a simple and straightforward housekeeping bill. Nonetheless, this is a matter that must be attended to. I hope my colleagues from the other side of the floor will agree with me that we should proceed expeditiously. I hope all members of the House will join me in supporting this bill to resolve the discrepancies between the legislation and the current reality while allowing enough flexibility to respond to future events.

I know that the government House leader would welcome the opportunity, no doubt, to express her gratitude to all those who assisted her in bringing forward the legislation I was able to present today. I would also like to thank the Conservative and New Democratic representatives at the technical briefings. I found them to be quite informative, and I appreciated their interest in listening to the technical support provided by the department.

With that, I appreciate the opportunity to introduce the legislation.

Government Orders

●(1025)

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek if you find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the recorded division on the amendment to the motion for third reading of Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be further deferred until the expiry of the time provided for oral questions on Tuesday, October 18, 2016.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate that there was some confusion in that unanimous consent motion previously, but I am concerned that a dangerous precedent was committed in terms of the fact that there was a clear “no” from this side on that motion. It was in fact carried out, and from the Chair, was agreed to. In future I think we need to be very careful to ensure that if there is not unanimous consent from the House of Commons, a motion does not get agreement, as such.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to thank the opposition whip for his point of order. What happens sometimes is that discussions happen, and some things are not clear, and it seems that not much was clear on either side, but we wanted to make sure we did the right thing. I am glad we retook it. We will take it under advisement and work from there.

* * *

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the parliamentary secretary in regard to Bill C-24. He was pretty vague, and the government has been very vague, on these three new positions. We understand that it would end up being two net new positions. However, there really was no explanation and no reason given as to why the government feels it has to create two open positions. At any point in time, if the Prime Minister decides he needs another member, or two members, or

however many, in his cabinet, he is free to appoint them and swear them in very easily and create those positions.

There really is no explanation, so we are at a loss. We have a lot of concerns about the bill, which I am going to be articulating shortly, but one of the questions I have is why there are three empty positions with no accountability and no answer as to why this is needed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current size of the cabinet has not been maximized. In other words, if the Prime Minister wanted to appoint more cabinet ministers, he could have, but he chose to appoint 30, including himself as the Prime Minister.

Making the changes to the legislation is more about the future than it is about what we have today. It builds in a little more flexibility. As to why we have added the three new untitled positions, the untitled positions provide flexibility in the structure of future ministries to reflect the priorities of the government, whether it is the current government or future governments. It is best when we are bringing in the legislation to do it in this form.

●(1030)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to follow up on my Conservative colleague's question and talk about the vagueness and some questions I still have, even after the speech, about what we are talking about today and voting on at a later date.

First, what is the difference between the designation of minister for a department versus a minister in respect of whom a department is designated, which is what we formerly called ministers of state?

Have those in cabinet currently known as ministers of state, who are now all women, been given more responsibility than previous ministers of state in previous governments?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. That is one reason we wanted to bring the legislation in as quickly as we have. Ministers of state had a perception that they were second-tier ministers. The Prime Minister made a commitment, when he announced the cabinet, that all cabinet ministers would be equal and that one should not think any less of a minister appointed as a minister of state. What we are doing with this legislation is affirming the commitment the Prime Minister made when he announced the cabinet. That is the essence of what we have done.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in terms of equality, I may have misunderstood the comments the member made earlier. Could I presume that these new ministers of state, or whatever they are called, would have the same office budgets and employ the same number of people? I know, for instance, that the Minister of Finance may have as many as 20 people, so would each of them have the same budget in terms of promoting equality?

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, depending on the department, the budgets of each department, and what it is they are responsible for administering, different ministers will have different complements of staff. We are talking about the sense of equality around the table and the way departmental staff can be brought over to one or two different ministers. As I indicated, there is no increase in the number of departments. This strictly deals with ensuring that we have a one-tier level of cabinet ministers.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised and disappointed. I hope we do not spend a lot of time on this. I totally support the bill.

I have been through four prime ministers, and I just assumed that the Prime Minister chose the cabinet and how the cabinet ministers are paid, whatever the numbers are, and that the public would hold the government to account for that. I am sure that all members in the House have some pressing issues in their ridings they would rather be discussing. I hope the powers that be in the future look at structuring this so that we do not need the whole House of Commons debating such technical changes.

• (1035)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one of the ways I can highlight what it is we are doing is by looking at the minister responsible for the status of women. The government, and particularly the Prime Minister, believes that the status of women minister should not have been designated a minister of state. We are saying that at the cabinet table, that particular minister is equal to the Minister of Finance and that all ministers carry equal influence around the cabinet table. A minister and a minister of state are equal.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I find disappointing about the speech and the answers the member opposite is giving us is that all the information we are trying to get about the responsibilities of ministers of state and ministers, and about the resources that will be allocated to ministers of state under this new salary bill, is vague and random.

If the Prime Minister wanted women in positions comparable to those of their male colleagues, why did he not appoint as many female ministers as male to begin with? Why did he appoint only female ministers of state and not as many female ministers initially?

If the goal is to achieve pay equity for all Canadian women, why is the government putting the pay equity bill off until 2018 even though a report was presented 12 years ago? Why hold more consultations? If pay equity really is important to the Liberals, then why is pay equity for all Canadian women not yet a reality?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is, in essence, reflecting on one of the examples that I provided, that being the minister responsible for the status of women. There is a leading role for her on that particular issue.

When our leader became Prime Minister and announced his cabinet, he clearly indicated to all Canadians that he does not distinguish between two tiers of ministers. What he sees is one tier. This legislation fulfills the commitment he made to Canadians when he appointed his gender equal cabinet.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

I want to talk briefly about what it looks like the bill would do, and then a little longer about what it would actually do, and its implications.

As my hon. colleague across the way said, the bill attempts to make all cabinet ministers equal. It would also allow the creation of three new cabinet posts, without actually naming what those cabinet posts would be. It then eliminates all of the ministers for the regional economic development agencies. Those are the three main things that the bill proposes to do, as well as some housekeeping issues tied to the financial implications of doing that.

I will talk a little about those three things, some of which are more important than others. I will start with the issue of making all ministers equivalent.

Some would argue that there was a fairly good system set up under previous governments, including our previous Conservative government. In that system, there were ministers of state who had smaller portfolios without the same scope, and perhaps not the same impact on the country or the same status as other ministers' portfolios. For example, the minister of sport, although running a very good ministry, was considered and styled as minister of state, because that minister probably did not have the same impact on the country as, let us say, the minister of defence.

I was a minister of state, so I can tell everyone in the House directly about my experience. I was a minister of state for social development. When I sat at the cabinet table with the minister for foreign affairs, the minister of health, and the minister of finance, I had completely equal status with them in terms of what I said. I had equal time to speak to the Prime Minister. My opinions had equal weight, and it was a great experience.

That said, the fact was that the minister of state portfolio I had was different. It was important, but it was different from that of the minister of defence, for example. Some would argue that that distinction is important to recognize. However, the Liberals have said that they want to make all ministerial portfolios equal. They have proposed doing that because, let us fact it, they have gotten themselves into a bit of a state. They have a bit of a problem because they put a number of people in as ministers of state and were criticized for it, and now they want to fix it all.

I am not going to spend a lot of time on this. I think it is a shell game. Frankly, I would have been immensely insulted and refused to be one of these ministers whom the government has used as tokens and told, "Sorry, we put you in the wrong position, but don't worry, we're going to pay you as much as every other minister, but you actually won't have that responsibility, you won't have a deputy minister, and you won't have the same scope. But don't worry your pretty little head about it, because we're going to pay you the same amount".

Government Orders

This is the shell game that we see the Liberals do time and time again. They did it on Bill C-22, when they introduced that bill to create oversight over CSIS. It is a shell game. We see it in their consultations with the provinces. It is a shell game. It is window dressing.

This part of the bill is all window dressing. It is an insult to the ministers who are now ministers of state but will soon be full cabinet ministers, and frankly, it is an insult to Canadians, but it is not a surprise.

I am going to leave that part. There are other things I want to talk about that are more important in their impact on our country.

The second part of the bill that I am concerned about is these three blank ministerial positions that would be created, but which no one knows what they would be for. The bill was introduced about a week-and-a-half ago, and so I have had a little time to look at it. When I was reading the bill, I thought that maybe they have a couple of friends in high places that they need ministerial portfolios for.

• (1040)

Maybe it is for Gerald Butts? Maybe the Liberals need a minister for moving expenses. Maybe they need a minister for increasing taxes, but then I realized that every one of their ministers are ministers for increasing taxes. Maybe they need a minister for photography. Obviously I am being facetious, but the point is that we do not know what these ministerial spots would be for and, frankly the answer that the parliamentary secretary gave me was not sufficient. In fact, he answered his own question.

The Prime Minister right now has not even used the full scope of the ministers he has available. There is no reason that these three empty spots have to be created, and one has to wonder what game is going on. What is the plan? We do not have an answer for that. We do not know what these posts are for.

The third reason, and frankly the most important one, that we cannot support the bill is that it would eliminate all of the ministers for the regional economic development agencies.

Let me explain what this would do. It would not eliminate the regional economic development agencies themselves. I want to read them off for the record. There are currently six regional economic development agencies, and under our government and previous governments, there were ministers from each of those regions who oversaw these economic development agencies.

For example, we still have Western Economic Diversification Canada. Under our government, we had an individual from western Canada in charge of that portfolio, who understood and represented the region, and could get feedback from people from western Canada. Right now, under this legislation, that minister would be gone.

As for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the region of Quebec, there was always a minister from Quebec who oversaw that regional agency. When there are so many Liberal members of Parliament from Quebec, what an insult it is that not one of them could now be named to this portfolio. I am from Manitoba. I cannot tell people in Quebec what would benefit them, what they

need for economic development, but what an insult it is to those in Quebec to say it will not have its own regional minister for Quebec.

As for the federal economic development initiative for northern Ontario, or FedNor, being from Manitoba, I understand northern Ontario. I am sorry, but some members are from Toronto and some of the members across the way are from northern Ontario. Northern Ontario is a little bit like Manitoba in some ways. We have a lot in common. It is not like Toronto at all, or Mississauga.

Then there is the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. Okay, we have one from Toronto, which makes sense.

As for Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, my colleague from Yukon just said that we should quickly get this bill through. Does he realize that without having a minister from the north watching over it and being accountable and listening to people from his region, he is being hamstrung in the job he needs to do? Instead, it is a minister from Toronto.

Then we have the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agencies, ACOA. Here we go again with Atlantic Canada. There are 32 competent members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada. Could one of them not have been named as the minister overseeing ACOA? Instead the government has centralized power in one member of Parliament, one individual MP, and that is the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development from Mississauga.

We are seeing regional interests and accountability for these agencies being ignored. There is a lot of money going through these agencies. There was a reason there needed to be a minister to oversee each one of these agencies. There is a reason there is a minister looking over the money that is flowing through and where it is going. Now there is one minister who also has Innovation as his responsibility. He is in a pretty good portfolio, but he is in charge of each one of these economic development agencies.

Regions are being ignored, accountability is being ignored, as we see the very worrisome trend of regional ministers being taken away in practice already, before this legislation. Under previous Liberal governments and under our previous government, there was always a regional minister in each province.

• (1045)

For example, in Manitoba we had a couple of very good regional ministers, one being the former member of Parliament and minister, Vic Toews, now Justice Vic Toews. He served as our regional minister for a number of years. We saw regional ministers in B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec.

However, now that these ministerial positions have been eliminated, there is no one in the provinces for the provincial governments to go to when they are having a problem and need a regional minister to connect his or her cabinet with in Ottawa to bring their issues forward. The municipalities have no one to talk to.

Government Orders

In Manitoba, we are hearing it over and over again. Municipalities are asking us who the regional minister for Manitoba is. They wonder if it is the Minister of Natural Resources, because he says one thing and the Minister of Labour says something different. In Quebec, there is no regional minister. That is what I am hearing from my colleagues in Quebec. Municipalities and provinces do not know who to go to. What is happening is a massive sucking noise of the centralization of power.

Last Monday, we saw the provincial ministers for environment meet with the federal minister. However, it is pretty scary when the federal government has the ability to say to the provinces “If you don't get in line with us on CPP, on the carbon tax, on health care, we're cutting off your infrastructure funding, and you don't have a regional minister who is going to say anything, because there is none”. There is one guy from Toronto and a guy from Edmonton who are going to be making the decisions, and that is it.

This is scary, because it is going to be the Prime Minister and his cronies who are making these decisions. However, it really should not be a surprise when we look at what the government has done in ignoring the regions, whether ignoring the normal convention of appointing judges from Atlantic Canada to the Supreme Court of Canada, whether ignoring the provinces when it comes to imposing a carbon tax, or whether ignoring jobs that are needed in Alberta and New Brunswick by not standing up for energy east. There is a huge lack of respect by the federal government toward the regions and their need to be represented.

As far as imposing a carbon tax on the provinces is concerned, we have just seen it happen. Some provinces have said they do not want a carbon tax, and some have said they want to fight climate change, but they do not want the federal government telling them how to do it, because the federal government does not always understand what is happening in northern and rural Manitoba, for example.

I think Brad Wall, the Premier of Saskatchewan, said it very well:

I cannot believe that while the country's environment ministers were meeting on a so-called collaborative climate change plan, the prime minister stood in the House of Commons and announced a carbon tax unilaterally...The level of disrespect shown by the prime minister and his government today is stunning.

I think the bill before us is showing that same disrespect. It is showing disrespect to the people who are supposed to be full ministers, but who will not now have their own deputy ministers, and they will not have the same scope and responsibility. For example, the Minister of Science is not equivalent to the Minister of National Defence. She will not have the same budget. She will not have the same staff. She will not have the same authority. What utter disrespect and window dressing toward that woman.

Then we are seeing disrespect for the regions to the effect that, “Atlantic Canada, Quebec, western Canada, we know you're suffering from job losses, but you don't need your own minister of economic diversification, you don't need your own minister to see economy flourish. We'll just put it in the hands of Toronto and the Prime Minister and you'll be fine”.

Finally, directly to the Canadian people, the Prime Minister just wants to be able to appoint as many ministers as he wants *carte blanche*. He wants three blank spots. I have never heard of that happening before.

● (1050)

If a prime minister wants to put more cabinet ministers in place, he makes the decision, he gets—

An hon. member: He has blank spots already.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, some say he has blank spots already in his cabinet. I will not comment on that. That might be for questions and answers.

There is disrespect to Canadians by not answering who those ministers are. The Prime Minister could just decide. If he wants to appoint more ministers, he could make that decision, go to the Governor General, have them sworn in, make the announcement to Canadians, and it is done. Liberals have made no case for having these three open positions, except that they are going to try to pull something on the Canadian people yet again.

Overall, the bill is disrespectful. It disrespects certain cabinet ministers, it disrespects the regions of Canada, and it disrespects Canadians. The shell game and the disrespect is overwhelming and it is a huge disappointment.

For those reasons, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

“this House decline to give second reading to Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, since the Bill:

(a) lacks transparency by failing to disclose the government's plans with respect to the creation of additional Ministers to be appointed in the future and changes in the financial status of others;

(b) enshrines in law the government's decision to eliminate regional Ministers responsible for regional economic development agencies.”

● (1055)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard in recent days a bit of anxiousness about introducing pay equity and the timetable for doing it. Now we know in the House and across Canada how long we would have to wait for pay equity for women if the Conservatives were still in power. It would not happen.

Unlike the opposition, Liberals believe that women, science, small business, tourism, sports, persons with disabilities, and francophones all deserve an equal spot at the table. The voices need to be equal. The effort is equal; the importance is equal; the pay should be equal.

Given that we believe that cabinet should be representative of all Canadians, which is exactly what we have done, why does the opposition House leader have a problem with this?

Statements by Members

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I have not talked about women. This has to do with making junior ministers equal. If they want to make junior ministers equal, then they can make them equal. Give them deputy ministers and give them full ministerial positions.

On the issue of them having full equality at the cabinet table, there is one person, and one person alone, who gives them full equality, and that is the Prime Minister. If he has a problem giving women equality at the cabinet table, that is his issue. What the legislation would do would not give women equality. It is a slap in the face. Conservatives do not support that.

More importantly, what Conservatives do not support is taking away the economic development ministers for each region. That is something that the government is quietly trying to do with the bill. It is trying to make this into a political issue. It can do what it wants, have its shell games around putting women into junior portfolios and then trying to make it look like it was not that. Frankly, Liberals have to look at themselves in the mirror every night and their female ministers have to look at themselves in the mirror and be basically used as tokens.

What Conservatives will not do is allow these regional economic development ministers to be stripped away from Quebec, Atlantic Canada, western Canada. That is what we are not standing for and that is the primary reason we are opposing the bill.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member will have seven minutes and 32 seconds remaining when we return to questions and comments after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF CARLINGWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, I had the pleasure of participating in Carlingwood public library's 50th anniversary celebrations. Libraries change lives and create opportunities.

At the age of 12, I started working in my local library. That exposure to books and knowledge led me to where I am today.

[*English*]

In response to the dropout rate at local area schools, Carlingwood library and Carlingwood Community Health Centre partnered and created the SWAG program, "Students Will All Graduate", to strengthen literacy and to enhance community engagement within libraries. Working with vulnerable teens, grades 9 to 11, SWAG has a success rate of 95%.

I would like to congratulate all those involved in this project and once again wish the Carlingwood library a very happy 50th anniversary.

FALL FAIRS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, across our beautiful country, the leaves are changing to bright colours, the fields are being harvested, and the pumpkins are ready for carving. It can only mean one thing, fair time.

Fall is the time of year when families, young and old, attend their local fairs for baking contests, carnival rides, quilt-making, livestock presentations, agricultural displays, and my favourite, deep-fried Mars bars. Most importantly, it is about family. Volunteers across Canada spend their entire year planning the next event so families can experience the smells, sounds, and flavours that each one of these fairs offers.

Throughout Elgin—Middlesex—London, many of these local fairs are even older than Canada. This weekend in Dorchester, I will be wrapping up my fall fair tour. I have enjoyed the fairs in many of our communities, including Shedden, Rodney, Wallacetown, Thornedale, and Aylmer.

I ask everyone to take the time to let their families experience what fall fairs are all about. It will be a memory they will cherish forever. Finally, happy Thanksgiving.

* * *

FLAGS OF REMEMBRANCE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today about a very proud moment that happened in Cape Breton last weekend.

At three o'clock in the afternoon at Open Hearth Park in Sydney, many Cape Bretoners gathered, along with nine other communities across Canada, to raise 128 flags, which represent 128,000 brave Canadian soldiers that have sacrificed their lives for peace and democracy around the world.

Students from Brookland Elementary School kicked off the ceremony with a singing of *O Canada*. Also in attendance was the family and Silver Cross mother of Glace Bay soldier, Sergeant Jimmy MacNeil, who was killed in Afghanistan two years ago. Each flag was donated by individuals and companies throughout the island.

This wonderful ceremony would not have taken place without the hard work of Neeta Kumar Britten, Allan Cameron, and their team, who worked tirelessly to arrange it.

These flags will stay up until November 12, the day after Remembrance Day, and their raising will now be an annual event. I encourage all communities across the country to fly the flags of remembrance and to honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

* * *

IBRAHIM JAME MOSQUE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last month in my riding of Hamilton Centre, a tragedy was averted thanks to the quick action of some of Hamilton's newest residents.

On the evening of September 14, a man approached the Ibrahim Jame Mosque and lit a fire at the front door. As the man fled, several passersby, Syrian refugees new to Canada, were able to put out the fire and help police identify the suspect. Thanks to these quick actions the damage to the building was minimal and a would-be arsonist was arrested.

As my dear friend Jack Layton said in his final letter to Canadians, love is better than hate. There is no place in Hamilton for the kind of hate that causes someone to try to burn down a mosque and we must do our best to combat Islamophobia in all its forms. I have been encouraged by the outpouring of support for the Ibrahim Jame Mosque from all across Hamilton. It is my sincere hope that this event will only serve to make our community more united and more respectful of people of all faiths and backgrounds.

* * *

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to celebrate Women's History Month, I set out to highlight a particular Canadian woman. However, as I started to do the research, I found that the list of women in Canada is perhaps shorter than it should be.

There is no question that throughout Canada's history there have been many women who have accomplished incredible things. Canadian women have fought to be heard. They have stood their ground at great personal cost, triumphed in the face of adversity, and thus shaped the fabric of our nation.

● (1105)

[Translation]

However, many of these women remain nameless, and their stories, untold.

[English]

I am challenging everyone, this Woman's History Month, to look around you and ensure that a great woman in your midst has her story told.

[Translation]

Her contributions must be celebrated. We need to encourage Canadian women to make a difference and inspire girls to follow their example.

[English]

History has its eyes on us. Let us ensure there are more Canadian—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

* * *

DONALD GREEN

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour the memory of Don Green of Brockville, Ontario, who died on September 29 at 86 years of age. Born in Toronto, the RMC graduate helped his father-in-law, Harrison Russell, grow United

Statements by Members

Maple Products into one of the largest maple syrup producers in Canada. He partnered with Robert Bras and grew Menu Foods into the largest private-label pet food producer of wet food in the world.

Knowing that he was blessed by his successes, his philanthropy touched people around the globe. From local investment, such as to the Brockville YMCA pool, to numerous projects at the local hospital, to the SOS Children's Villages in Namibia, his contributions would fill a book. The Don and Shirley Green Family Charitable Foundation, named with his wife of 60 years, ensures that his contributions will continue.

Mr. Green will be remembered as humble and grateful and a friend to all. On behalf of everyone he touched, I express my condolences to his wife Shirley, his children, his grandchildren, and his step-grandchildren.

* * *

[Translation]

MIGUEL COOCOO-CHACHAI AND BRAD FIRTH

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a young Atikamekw man from the Wemotaci community in Haute-Mauricie recently did something noble and courageous that truly deserves to be recognized and applauded.

Miguel Cocooo-Chachai ran from Odanak to Quebec City to raise awareness for the cause of missing and murdered indigenous women. From September 20 to 23, he ran over 170 kilometres. That is more than 42 kilometres a day, or the equivalent of a full marathon each day.

Miguel took over for Brad Firth, also known as Caribou Legs, who suffered an injury during his cross-Canada run for the same cause, which is important to us all. Brad left Vancouver in May and is now in New Brunswick. He is scheduled to arrive in St. John's, Newfoundland, in November.

In closing, as I said earlier, what these men are doing truly deserves to be applauded.

* * *

[English]

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the youth and educators across Thunder Bay—Rainy River, and indeed the country, who returned to school this past month. I have had many opportunities to meet with students since the election and have been inspired by their desire to engage in the political process.

A few weeks ago, I was honoured to participate in a youth round table with students such as little Robbie Parsons, and the Minister of Democratic Institutions. They asked some tough questions and expressed a desire to see a fair and inclusive Canada. I want to thank these students—students like Carter—for pushing us to be better, for sharing their perspective, and for reminding us that we all have an important job to do.

Statements by Members

I encourage the youth in my riding, such as those I spoke to last week at Rainy River High School, and those across the country, to join local youth councils, and I look forward to working with them all in the future.

Merci. Meegwetch.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Liberals showed their true colours.

The regional economic development agencies are no more. Out with the regional ministers. The Liberals have abandoned Canada's regions and, as a result, this government is turning its back on regional jobs, especially in the softwood lumber sector, because no one in this government realizes that tens of thousands of jobs are on the line.

Time is running out. There are only five days left before the agreement expires and the only thing the minister has to say about it is that the agreement expired a year ago. A year represents 365 days, 8,760 hours, or 725,000 minutes of time wasted by this government, which would rather please the United States than work for Canada's forestry workers.

On behalf of the families of the Lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé, the North Shore, Chaudière-Appalaches, Abitibi, Caribou—Prince George, and all the regions of Canada, I urge the Minister of International Trade to get to work immediately on protecting jobs, families, and communities in the regions. They expect a lot more from this Liberal government.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of serving on the Standing Committee for the Status of Women, and I want to invite all Canadians to celebrate the International Day of the Girl on October 11. Each year on this special day, we celebrate the hope and inspiration that girls and young women represent for our families, communities, and country.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

This day is also about drawing attention to the needs of girls all around the world who often face violence and poverty or are denied access to adequate education and health care.

Let us make the International Day of the Girl a day of action at home and around the world in order to eliminate the lingering inequalities between girls and boys in every aspect of their lives. On October 11, I encourage all Canadians to find a way to support and celebrate girls and young women.

[*English*]

CITY OF EDMONTON

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite tough economic times, my home city of Edmonton continues to enjoy modest growth. Edmontonians are resilient people. We know how to cut loose with everything from the International Street Performers Festival, the Jazz Festival, The Works Art and Design Festival, and the stunning Tour of Alberta.

Edmonton is a place of risk takers, where we happily wrap ourselves in rainbows for the Pride parade, proudly don head coverings for the Vaisakhi Sikh march, and gleefully gobble up food from around the world during our multicultural heritage festival.

Edmonton's renaissance is unfolding with transformative investments, including the new Valley Line LRT, our state-of-the-art Royal Alberta Museum, and Rogers Place, the new home to our Edmonton Oilers.

Located on Treaty 6 territory, and home to one of the largest populations of indigenous peoples in Canada, Edmonton is actively engaged in reconciliation.

I invite all members and all Canadians to visit Alberta's revitalizing capital city.

Happy Thanksgiving to all.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 60% of the surfaces in this historic chamber are made out of wood from Canada's forests. From our books to our homes to the very air we breathe, Canada's forests are an important renewable resource for everyone.

Canada's forestry workers are firmly rooted in our economy, generating \$21 billion from 400,000 jobs throughout rural Canada. However, political logjams like the softwood lumber agreement, continue to sap economic growth in my riding and across Canada. It is time for the Liberals to stop lumbering around and get the job done.

The Liberals' new carbon tax is not popular with rural Canadians either. This tax will whittle away every rural Canadian's paycheque and leave forestry workers pining for better days. The government should spruce up its efforts on job creation instead of imposing a new tax.

I am going to go out on a limb here, but if a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, will the Liberals find a way to tax that too?

* * *

MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for almost 150 years, immigration has been the story of Canada. Like millions of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, I was not born in this country. I came here as a refugee from Uganda, fleeing the persecution that my family and I faced in our country of birth simply because of our race and ancestry.

Today I am proud and indeed thankful that my new country, Canada, the country I call home, is respected for its multiculturalism, acceptance of newcomers, and openness to the world.

Regardless of people's skin colour, gender identity, sexual orientation, the religion they practise, or where they are born, Canada's strength always lies in the diversity of its people.

[Translation]

Next week is Citizenship Week in Canada. Let us celebrate Canadian identity. I encourage all Canadians to participate in a citizenship ceremony to reaffirm their citizenship. People can share their experience on social media by using #mycitizenship or #citizenshipweek.

[English]

Let us continue to write Canada's story for the next 150 years together.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 67% of Montreal's injection and inhalable drug users have hepatitis C, and rates of HIV infection show no sign of declining.

Dopamine is one of the only organizations working with drug users in my riding, Hochelaga. Having worked with the people at this organization for years, I can say that these consummate professionals are vital to our community.

However, this week I learned that the Public Health Agency of Canada cut \$200,000 from their budget. That money helped to get the most marginalized people in my riding on side in the fight against HIV and hepatitis C. Dopamine has been funded by the agency since 2009, and it is not the only organization to have had its funding cut.

This decision will definitely have a major impact on an already critical situation. Perhaps the agency experts who make these decisions need to get out of their offices once in a while and visit Hochelaga.

* * *

[English]

POVERTY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what will the new carbon tax do to the gap between rich and poor? From whom will the money come, and to whom will it go?

The carbon tax will apply to heat, gas, and groceries. Poor households spend a third more of their income on those items than do rich households, so the tax will make those with the least pay proportionally the most.

To whom will it go? The Prime Minister said it will fund provincial green energy programs. In Ontario, millionaire green energy insiders overcharged hydro customers by \$37 billion, forcing many to the food bank. Never has a program taken from so many to give so much to so few.

Oral Questions

Elsewhere, the CBC reported, "The Ontario government gave taxpayer-funded rebates to five millionaires to buy one of the most expensive cars ever manufactured, the Porsche 918 Spyder." No surprise. Big government always benefits the well-lawyered, the well-lobbied for, and the well-off.

The best way to fight poverty is for the government to stop fighting the poor.

* * *

• (1115)

[Translation]

HURRICANE MATTHEW AND HAITI

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning, it is with great sorrow that I rise to talk about the most recent natural disaster to hit Haiti, leaving at least 478 people dead.

My thoughts are with my Haitian brothers and sisters who were affected by the hurricane and with their families in Canada and Haiti.

Hurricane Matthew hit a number of Caribbean countries, but it caused catastrophic damage in Haiti. I am sad to report that over a million people were affected and major damage was done to already fragile homes and infrastructure.

The Canadian government reacted by offering emergency humanitarian aid and sent its disaster assessment team to the region. Let us stay at the ready because Haiti needs us.

[Member spoke in Creole as follows:]

Avev Map Maché.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Alison Azer was in Ottawa. For 14 months she has been fighting to bring her children home. They were kidnapped and taken to Iran. Shockingly, when the member for St. Albert—Edmonton raised this issue, the Minister of Foreign Affairs made inappropriate and unparliamentary gestures.

Will the minister apologize? Ms. Azer expects that. More importantly, when will the Liberals have the courage to do what it takes to bring these children home?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that some interpreted it to be directed at Madame Azer. It was obviously not the case. I have nothing but compassion for Madame Azer and cannot imagine the anguish she must be going through.

Oral Questions

I am disappointed in how the opposition is politicizing this heartbreaking situation. This is not helpful to Madame Azer and her children. Instead, we must all work together, all of us, to bring her children home. I am always open to consultative ways on how to do this.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as much as we appreciate that apology, there does seem to be a pattern among the Liberals of dismissing legitimate concerns and criticism.

We are concerned with that pattern. We are seeing it when it comes to issues like the carbon tax. There are Canadians who are extremely concerned about the additional taxes and the burden they will have to bear. We know that gas prices are going to skyrocket. We know that the price of food is going to skyrocket, and Canadians are expressing concern about this. They have seen what has happened in Ontario. They are seeing what is happening in Alberta, and instead of giving heed to these legitimate concerns, the Liberals are dismissing concerns. When will the Liberals—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the party opposite is so concerned about the middle class, I am wondering why it did not support our middle-class tax cut, or why it did not support the Canada child benefit enhancement for nine out of 10 families.

However, let us be clear about the price on carbon pollution. B.C. has given its carbon price back to individuals, families, and small businesses in tax cuts. That is up to the provinces to decide to do.

We are going to take action that shows that we can grow our economy in a clean way while protecting our environment.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Liberals have not shown a shred of evidence that this carbon tax will do anything to reduce emissions in Canada, much less globally. Why do the Liberals not just admit this actually has nothing to do with fighting climate change and has everything to do with filling their coffers for their reckless spending?

If they have evidence that it would reduce emissions in Canada, or globally, we want to see it.

• (1120)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry that the party opposite does not believe that we should be taking action to tackle climate change. They did not vote for the Paris agreement, when the critic actually joined me.

Let us point out where the evidence does show it has an impact. In British Columbia, they brought in a price on pollution, and what did they do? They reduced emissions while growing their economy. That is why the Conservative critic has said that B.C. did the right thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in May 2015, the Conservative government set targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Those targets are exactly the same as the

ones set out in the Paris agreement. That is why we are in favour of the Paris agreement. However, we are opposed to the Liberals' approach, which involves inventing, creating, and imposing, and that is the verb used by the Prime Minister, a new tax. That is not the right way to go about things.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has indicated that this tax will cost each Canadian family thousands of dollars.

The question is simple: does the government have the numbers? Does it know how much creating and imposing this new tax will cost families?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite said that he supports the Paris agreement. However, that was not the case a few days ago. He did not vote in favour of the Paris agreement.

Obviously, the Conservatives did not have a plan. They had targets, but no plan. We have a plan to fight climate change and grow our economy because we know that the economy and the environment go hand in hand.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before going to the next question, I just want to remind everyone that I am having a hard time hearing, and no one wants to upset the Speaker, so if you do not mind, maybe just keep it down. If you have some questions, maybe some follow-up, you might want to take it up after in the lobby or outside of the House. In the meantime, screaming across the floor is not going to help things.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with you, but what people say in the House must be accurate.

Contrary to what the minister just said, we support the Paris agreement, but not the Liberals' approach.

The fact is that the government's floor price is \$10 per tonne. We all know what floor price means: you can bet it will not be any lower, but the sky is the limit. The tax will go up, that is for sure.

I am going to ask my question again, and I would like to get an answer. How much more will Canadian families have to pay because of the Liberal carbon tax?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really confused. I do not see how my colleague can say the Conservative Party supports the Paris agreement when he voted against it.

Oral Questions

We know that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. That is why we are pricing carbon. In fact, 80% of Canadians, including Quebecers, already pay a carbon price. The Premier of Quebec supports our position. We are working with the provinces and territories because we are taking this seriously, because we want to grow our economy, a clean economy, and because—

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

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal platform said, in black and white, “We will end Canada’s combat mission in Iraq”. Canadians were told that, instead, our troops would just be training local forces, but yesterday, Brigadier-General Dawe said that there is less need for training, and troops are increasingly on the front line engaging directly with the enemy.

Canadians were told this would be a training mission. Has the mission changed?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mission in Iraq was always advise and assist, and it continues to be an advise and assist mission. With the evolving situation there, as we work with the local forces, it allows for the local troops to be able to take their fight to Daesh, and that is exactly what we are doing. Our troops are doing a wonderful job.

I just met with the special envoy to counter ISIL for the U.S. and he complimented our work. We will continue to work with our coalition partners to have a continued impact against Daesh.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting response but not an answer to my question.

The brigadier-general has just revealed, “The mission has changed since the spring.” We are told the mission has moved from defensive to offensive, and after promising increased transparency, the Liberals will not tell us how often our troops come under fire and how many are on the ground in Iraq.

Does the minister believe that Canadians have a right to know about the increasing risk to our soldiers in Iraq?

• (1125)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when dealing with conflict and an enemy like this, the situation obviously is going to change and we adjust with it to make sure that we are an effective coalition partner.

In terms of transparency, we have been extremely open with it. Hence, the reason we actually did this technical briefing, and who better to be able to brief us on how the mission is going than our generals. I have always been open to providing information to Canadians and I will always continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Brigadier-General Dawe confirmed that Canadian troops have exchanged fire with Daesh fighters, but he will not say how

often that has occurred. Our armed forces continue to participate in air strikes, but we do not know how often.

We are told that the situation today is more dangerous and more complicated, and that it will take years to defeat Daesh.

How long are the Liberals going to keep our troops engaged in this new, more dangerous mission that is unfolding on the front lines?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the number of times the attacks happen, we are not going to be giving regular updates on this, because there is an operational security risk to it. When we start giving certain metrics to the enemy, it creates a pattern and the protection of our troops is the utmost security priority.

However, in terms of the evolving mission, we have been keeping Canadians up to date. I have always stated that we will always assess, every single year, how the mission is going and make adjustments so that we can continue to have the appropriate impact, and we are having a considerable impact. That is exactly what our government said we were going to do and that is exactly what we are achieving.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have a right to be informed. Canadians have been told that the risk to our troops has increased, because contrary to what the Liberals promised during the election campaign, our soldiers are spending less and less time in the classroom and more and more time on the front lines.

Is the government refusing to disclose this information because it wants to hide the fact that the Canadian Forces are becoming increasingly involved in combat?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear from the outset on the complexity of conflicts like this. Advise and assist requires us to be effective on the ground, to be able to train the folks, mentor them, help them on operations. That is exactly what we are doing.

We are going to be adjusting the mission accordingly to make sure we have the appropriate impact. I have always stated that we have to train the right number of troops on the ground if we are going to take the fight to Daesh. That is exactly what we have accomplished and we are having a massive impact. We got tremendous compliments from the U.S. special envoy to counter ISIL, and we will always continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with him.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, poor households spend a third more of their incomes on heat, gas, and groceries, than do rich households. A carbon tax that would raise the price of those goods will take a relatively larger bite out of the incomes of the poor than of the rich, which is the very definition of “regressive”.

Why is the Prime Minister imposing a regressive tax that would force those with the least to suffer the most?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite and the party opposite is so concerned about the middle class, I wonder why they did not support our middle-class tax cut and why they did not support an enhancement to the Canada child benefit, which now helps nine out of 10 Canadian families and raises over 300,000 children out of poverty.

Let us be clear about pricing pollution. Any revenue raised from pricing pollution would remain in the province. Provinces could do as British Columbia has done: growing its economy while returning revenues in the form of tax cuts to small businesses and to families.

This is the way we are moving forward to grow our economy and to protect the environment. I wish the other party would join us.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is right. It will stay with provincial governments to fund so-called green programs, like in Ontario, where millionaire green energy insiders have overcharged hydro customers by \$37 billion, forcing many into the food bank, or to quote the CBC:

The Ontario government gave taxpayer-funded rebates to five millionaires to buy one of the most expensive cars ever manufactured, the Porsche 918 Spyder.

Now the working guy, filling up his Ford Focus, will pay an 11-cent-a-litre tax to fund green handouts to Porsche-driving millionaires. Why?

• (1130)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always find it surprising that the party opposite would be against a market measure that is supported by businesses across Canada.

Let me get this straight. We now have Canadian companies, like Suncor and Shell, job creators that are supporting putting a price on pollution—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

I am sure the hon. minister appreciates the coaching she is getting from the opposite benches, but it is making it very difficult for the rest of us to hear. If we can just keep it quiet while the answers are going, it would certainly be appreciated.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. The member opposite is criticizing companies that are actually supporting putting a price on pollution. These companies created 900,000 jobs and \$400 billion in revenue, and they get it. The

environment and the economy go together. We need to reduce emissions while moving to a clean growth economy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a new grandfather, as of just hours ago, I understand more than ever the concerns that thousands of Canadian families have over the negative impact the carbon tax will have on their household spending and on all consumer goods. I am talking about the price of things like groceries, transportation, heating, and everything else that will go up.

Is the Liberal government aware of how harmful the carbon tax will be for young, middle-class Canadian families?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague on becoming a grandfather.

As a mother of three, I know that we need to take a cleaner approach to growing our economy. We also have to tackle climate change. That is what we are doing. We are putting a price on carbon, because that solution uses market forces to lower emissions and grow a cleaner economy. We are doing this for my children and for my colleague's grandchildren.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government is taking money out of young families' wallets with both hands with the implementation of the Liberals' carbon tax. This new tax, imposed this week in a cavalier way, leaves no financial room to manoeuvre for the future, in other words, for our children and grandchildren.

How can the Liberal government claim that its ideological carbon tax will have no impact on the economic prosperity of future generations?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, part of my portfolio is to constantly think about future generations. That is why we have to ensure that we have a cleaner economy. We need good jobs and we must protect our environment. That is what we are doing.

I will quote the Premier of Quebec who said, “We believe it's good [carbon pricing], and it's not going to affect the functioning of our trading system. It puts everyone on the same course, in a strong position to combat climate change”.

I hope the party across the way will—

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

The hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

[*English*]

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all week the Liberals have been trying to portray themselves as Robin Hood in their own carbon-tax forest, all the while acting like the Sheriff of Nottingham, shaking down Canadians to build their own kingdom.

Oral Questions

It is no fairy tale that the cost of everything will go up under the Prime Minister's plan. For my constituents, the commute to Kitchener-Waterloo or into the GTA, or a flight out of Hamilton airport, or simply putting fuel in a tractor will cost them more.

When will the Liberals come clean about their motives to the Canadian people? Even Friar Tuck and Maid Marian would like to know.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was actually born in Hamilton, so I know that area very well.

I would just like to be clear that this is about growing the economy, and it is about protecting our environment. Unfortunately, the party opposite does not understand that that is the direction we need to go. Provinces are entitled to determine what system works for them and what to do with the revenues.

We have the support of business, job creators, because they understand that this is the way we are going to grow our economy, we are going to create good jobs, and we are going to create export opportunities for Canadian businesses to create more wealth for the middle class.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to a recent report, Canadians are now spending more on taxes than they are on food, clothing, and shelter combined.

I worry about seniors living on fixed incomes in my constituency, whether they are from Brandon, Melita, or Pilot Mound, who cannot afford any more taxes. They cannot afford increased grocery or gas bills.

Will the Liberals commit today that their carbon tax will not take one more nickel out of the pockets of seniors living on fixed incomes?

• (1135)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite was so concerned about seniors living on fixed incomes, then he should have supported reducing the age of old age security to 65.

We also brought in a tax cut for the middle class. We brought in an enhanced Canada child benefit.

Let us be clear: the revenues from any price on pollution go back to the provinces. The provinces can do what B.C. is doing, giving tax cuts to families and also giving money back to small businesses.

* * *

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all make mistakes. The responsible course of action is to apologize and move on.

Whether he intended it or not, the actions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs offended Alison Azer.

I have two questions for the minister. Will he give a clear apology to Ms. Azer? Will he update this House on the efforts to secure the safe return of the four Azer children?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly feel sorry that what I did yesterday was interpreted as being directed at Madam Azer, because obviously, that was not the case.

I am encouraging all colleagues to not politicize this really difficult issue, to all work together to see which way, with constructive propositions, we may bring these kids into the arms of their mother.

This is the only goal the Prime Minister has, and I have, and the whole government has. I hope each member of this House will work together to solve this problem.

* * *

[Translation]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government promised to make education for first nations children a priority. The Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs even presented a plan to the minister to help her government keep its promises, but she chose to ignore the department's recommendation. I asked the minister to justify her decision, but she did not give me an answer.

I am going to try again. Can the minister explain why she chose to ignore that plan?

Why does she continue to say one thing here and another outside the House?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first nations children deserve to get the best possible start in life and that begins with sufficient funding for education.

Budget 2016 provides for \$3.7 billion over five years for K-12 education, including \$824.1 million to reform first nations education.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign the Prime Minister said that it made no sense to impose plans to decrease greenhouse gas emissions on the provinces, and that it was up to them to find a solution to the problems in their provinces. Now the Liberals are imposing a carbon tax that will increase costs for middle-class families.

Why do the Liberals want to help themselves to more money from Canadian middle-class families?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to see that the opposition party is concerned about the middle class, because that party certainly did not support our tax cuts for the middle class.

We are working with the provinces and the territories. I will again quote the Premier of Quebec, Philippe Couillard:

Oral Questions

We believe it's good [carbon pricing], and it's not going to affect the functioning of our trading system. It puts everyone on the same course, in a strong position to combat climate change.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has decided to reduce greenhouse gases by increasing taxes on Canadians. This will raise the price of gasoline at the pump by 11¢ a litre and cost middle-class Canadian families thousands of dollars annually.

Can the environment minister tell the House when her department calculated exactly how many jobs would be lost as part of the Liberals' rash scheme to impose a carbon tax on Canadians?

● (1140)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason we are putting a price on emissions and on pollution is because we want to grow our economy. That is why we have job creators, major energy companies, the five big banks, and consumer companies saying to actually do this, because it will help us reduce emissions and innovate. Innovation is a good thing. I hope the member opposite believes that, because innovation is necessary so that we position ourselves well to have clean solutions that we can then export, and grow our economy.

* * *

ETHICS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, the President of the Treasury Board claimed that he had never been lobbied by the McCain family. We now know that this is not true. In fact, the minister met with Michael McCain in March, and the meeting was registered with the Commissioner of Lobbying. Why did the Liberal minister mislead Canadians?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes our guidance on these matters from the Ethics Commissioner and the Lobbying Commissioner. The President of the Treasury Board proactively approached the commissioner's offices to disclose his situation and his holdings, which have been placed in a blind trust.

The commissioner decides whether a conflict of interest screen is necessary, and based on the facts of the president's case and situation, she decided against the screen.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioners decide based on the information they are provided. I just want to note that. This is absolutely just another Liberal when it comes to ethics. If this was a meeting with his close friend, which he just called a social meeting, then why was it registered as lobbying if it was just a social meeting? When will the Liberal minister stop misleading Canadians and admit that there is a problem of ethics here?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes guidance from the commissioners, the Ethics Commissioner, and not from the Conservative Party of Canada.

The President of the Treasury Board has proactively disclosed the situation to the commissioner, and he has followed her guidance. All of his holdings have been placed in a blind trust, and the

commissioner has decided it is not necessary to have an ethics screen in this situation. I would point out that the person in question has publicly said that no lobbying was done during that meeting.

* * *

[Translation]

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since coming to power, the Liberals have taken no meaningful action on diafiltered milk.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food admitted that the dairy farmers' and processors' ingredient strategy is not good enough. The minister spent more than a year consulting farmers and every other industry stakeholder, but he is still looking for a solution. That is just outrageous.

I have one simple question: will the government enforce cheese compositional standards starting now, yes or no?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a dairy farmer, I am proud that Canada can count on such a strong, dynamic dairy industry.

As we on this side of the House have said and will continue to say, supply management is an important pillar of our agriculture sector. Unlike others who would like to abolish it, we support our Canadian supply management. We support our dairy producers and their families, and we support the entire Canadian dairy industry.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in less than a week, the softwood lumber agreement grace period will run out, and this could mean massive export tariffs on Canadian lumber, anywhere from 25% to 30%. If we do not get a new agreement, we could lose up to 22,000 jobs in British Columbia and across Canada. Yet the minister has refused to give any assurances this week.

As the deadline looms, what is the government doing to protect forestry jobs in British Columbia?

● (1145)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Oral Questions

We are working hard on this file. Our negotiators are working hard on this file. On Tuesday, in Toronto, the minister participated in a productive conversation with USTR Michael Froman as well as with Canadian industry representatives, including representatives from British Columbia and from the rest of the country. We continue to work closely with lumber producers, workers, provinces, and territories in close collaboration as we advance this file.

Any agreement has to reflect the realities of every region across the country, so we are looking for an agreement, but not just any agreement.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Hurricane Matthew is the most powerful hurricane to hit the Caribbean in decades.

This natural disaster killed over 500 people in Haiti. Entire towns were completely destroyed, and no one knows what will happen to the residents of the many communities that remain cut off.

Can the Minister of National Defence update the House on Canada's efforts to provide immediate assistance to the victims of Hurricane Matthew in Haiti and elsewhere in the region?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Canadians are saddened by and concerned about the devastation and loss suffered by our friends in Haiti and in other countries in the region. Our government has sent a Canadian disaster and assessment team to Haiti comprised of three experts from Global Affairs and three officers from the Canadian Armed Forces, and they will rapidly assess the situation. In the interim, we have committed \$3 million as an initial humanitarian response.

We stand ready, with my colleague from International Development, to respond quickly and effectively for those who are in need of immediate assistance.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the Canadian Forces mission in Iraq is quite different than the one the government has described. Our troops are no longer training local forces. They are engaged directly on the front lines, fighting alongside the Kurds.

Yesterday General Dawe even confirmed that the Canadian Forces have exchanged fire with ISIL several times.

We support our soldiers in Iraq. However, we would like to know why the Minister of National Defence hid the fact that the mission has changed from Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing that has changed in the mission is that we are far more effective. With the changes that were made to the mission, everything that has been accomplished has been done with the advise and assist mandate.

For the protection of our troops, we provided the appropriate rules of engagement and the appropriate equipment. It is a dangerous situation. When our troops are under threat, they need to respond to protect themselves, their colleagues, and the people they are working with.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is interesting is that we are hearing a new buzz word from the Minister of National Defence called “advise and assist”. Does that mean combat, yes or no?

Yesterday we heard from military leaders who confirmed that Canadian soldiers are spending more time on the front lines and are engaging in more firefights with ISIS, but on this, the Liberals have been silent.

Conservatives will always recognize the right of our soldiers to defend themselves. The fact is, the Conservatives held regular technical briefings and informed the House of the actions of our troops, but that is not happening under the Liberals.

Will the Liberals finally admit that they are withholding information because what is actually happening in Iraq is counter to the Liberal peacekeeping agenda?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous government had briefings for the sake of political games. That was what was happening.

I have been extremely transparent in giving information. I provide briefings to my counterparts on a regular basis and actually before we make announcements. I will not give up information that would provide information to the enemy.

I have been very open, the reason we have the technical briefings in the first place. On any future changes to the mission, I am happy to provide greater information and make myself available to my colleagues to answer any questions they might have.

* * *

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Foreign Affairs gave a thumbs down when I called on the government to make the return of the Azer children a priority. The minister came close today to apologizing, but yesterday he doubled down, by deploying a Liberal insider to criticize Alison Azer for daring to speak up for the return of her children.

Will the minister give a sincere apology to Alison Azer, and, second, apologize for deploying a Liberal insider to criticize Alison Azer's efforts?

Oral Questions

● (1150)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is imperative in order to resolve heart-breaking cases as this family's that all colleagues in this House work together. The opposition is free to instead politicize this issue in an unhelpful way, as my colleague did yesterday.

Now that members know how I feel about harmful politicization, I will come back to my usual impeccable parliamentary behaviour, and again I will say that my door is open. Let us all work together to reunite this family.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly interesting that the minister would say that, because it certainly was not the Liberal approach with the case of Mohamed Fahmy. Needless to say, the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not answer the question that was posed by the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni to provide this House and all Canadians with an update on the status of the Azer children. Will he do so now?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly not reveal information that will hurt the case. I have no other goal than to bring these children home with their mother.

I am only saying that in order to succeed, we need to work all together and avoid politicizing this issue.

If the opposition has concrete suggestions to make on how to bring these children out of Iran, my door is open, and the door of my parliamentary secretary is open, for constructive suggestions from any of our colleagues.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government has acknowledged that pay equity is a fundamental human right, so why is it asking Canadian women to wait another two years? Enough is enough.

The previous Liberal government shelved pay equity legislation in 2005. Women should not have to wait until 2018 for this Liberal government to do the right thing. The Liberals have everything they need to introduce pay equity legislation now. What are they waiting for?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to inform the House that we have a government that will actually implement proactive pay equity legislation, not like the previous government, and not like the opposition that wishes it could.

This is a government that will actually do it.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a video that went viral, five-year-old Brooke Blair gets angry with the British Prime Minister because she does not understand why people are living on the street and no one is doing anything about it.

In her heartfelt appeal, she says:

[English]

They “should be out there”. They should be “building houses”.

[Translation]

Even a five-year-old knows that if we build more houses there will be fewer people on the street. The best investment is social housing.

When will the minister announce long-term funding for social housing?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague for giving me this opportunity to say that this morning, just a few hours ago, I had a very productive meeting with the most important players and partners in the social community sector on the matter of housing.

We had a very fruitful discussion, on the heels of countless discussions I had the privilege of taking part in over the past few months. We look forward to working with the community to ensure that all Canadians can benefit from decent and affordable housing.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Mayor of Hudson Bay, Elvina Rumak, said the impending closure of The Pas softwood lumber mill will impact contractors in Saskatchewan who harvest softwood for Carrot River and hardwood for Hudson Bay.

Mel Cadrain, GM Hudson Bay Timberlands, said that if the mill in The Pas closes, it will put pressure on them to utilize small diameter softwood, which will increase their raw material cost and reduce mill productivity.

This means fewer jobs. Why is the current sitting Liberal government taking so long to get this badly needed agreement done?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's concern for the softwood industry in northern Saskatchewan, and indeed across the country.

We understand how important this industry is across the whole of the country. We understand its complexity across the whole of the country. All of this has been incorporated into our negotiating position. We are working hard, in collaboration with everyone in the industry. We are working hard with our American friends to try to reach a solution to this problem that will benefit the Canadian softwood—

● (1155)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking. In Alberta, the forest industry employs over 19,000 people, the majority of whom are in my riding of Yellowhead. My constituents and the forest industry deserve to know what their future will be. Albertans cannot afford another drastic hit. There is no time to waste. Too many jobs are at stake.

Oral Questions

Why will the minister not do her job and ensure stability and predictability for Canadian forestry workers?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reject the assumption of the hon. member's question. The minister has been working very hard since she came into office to resolve this issue. Indeed, Premier Christy Clark of British Columbia said, "I've got to give her [the minister] credit, she's worked day and night to try and resolve this. It's been her central focus for the last several months."

No one is working harder on this file than the Minister for International Trade. Our negotiators are working hard. We understand its importance, and we will do our best to get a good deal done.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, well, look who just woke up.

In 2006, the Conservative government brought confidence and consistency to a divided forestry industry. Through ongoing talks with our counterparts and forestry stakeholders, we set the stage for the Liberal government to finalize a new softwood lumber agreement. Unfortunately, the trade minister has only just realized that trade deals do not magically negotiate themselves.

When will the trade minister tell the almost 400,000 forestry workers that their jobs are on the line because she has mismanaged this file since the very beginning?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member what he himself said on August 18. He said, "I can appreciate there's been considerable amount of work done to this point...by both Global Affairs and the minister". He was indeed speaking the truth at that point. The minister has worked very hard on this file from the beginning.

We understand its importance to British Columbia and to the member's riding, as well as to other ridings across Canada. We will get a deal done, and we will do it if it is in the best interests of Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, parental leave and maternity leave are essential for Canadian families, but our government can do more to adapt to the new realities facing families.

Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development tell the House what he is doing to move forward on this important issue?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Kingston and the Islands on his excellent French and thank him for the great work that he is doing for his riding and to make maternity benefits more flexible and easily accessible.

Our government promised to support parents and family caregivers by providing them with more flexible and inclusive

benefits. Yesterday, my colleague and I had the privilege of announcing that consultations on this issue have begun.

We look forward to hearing from all Canadian families in order to ensure that the employment insurance program is useful to them and is there for them when they need it most.

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, approximately 150 people participated in the veterans summit this week, yet one-quarter of them had never been in the Canadian Armed Forces and nearly half were not recipients of Veterans Affairs Canada programs or services.

Must I remind the minister that the point of this type of summit is to improve the benefits offered by his department, not to serve the Liberal government's own agenda?

The minister told veterans to be patient because he was still working on identifying the most pressing issues.

Why then does he not consult the veterans who are most affected by his department?

[English]

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since I came into this position on November 4, we have had three stakeholder summits, with over 150 people in attendance at all of these summits. Various veterans from all groups and all walks of life have contributed meaningfully and deeply to policy developments, from the range of economic security to families to mental health and physical well-being. These stakeholder summits are going well, and we will continue to engage and consult veterans from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

● (1200)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the striped bass population has gone from a species of concern to a high-level count never seen before in the Miramichi watershed. Striped bass is a predatory fish to salmon and other species, and salmon is at an all-time low in the river.

[Translation]

My question is this: will the minister tell the House whether next season's striped bass management plan will include increased allocations for first nations, to help meet their food and ceremonial needs, and increased sport fishing quotas for the public, since people can no longer keep salmon?

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Miramichi—Grand Lake for that excellent question, but, more importantly, for the work he has done on this issue that is so important to his community.

Oral Questions

I share his concern with the increasing abundance of striped bass populations. I have instructed the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to update the science. I hope we will be in a position next year to further extend management measures that will allow greater retention of this fish. We know how important it is for the Atlantic salmon population. I look forward to working with the member and other colleagues on this important issue.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, child and adult victims of sex trafficking are being sold daily on Backpage.com. In June, I raised this horrific issue in this chamber and wrote directly to the justice minister, with no response.

Yesterday, the CEO of Backpage was arrested in the U.S. on sex trafficking charges.

When will the Liberals finally take action to end Backpage.com sex trafficking ads in Canada?

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for raising this important issue. This government takes very seriously the issue of sex trafficking in our country. We are working very carefully with the provinces and territories, and with law enforcement partners across the country, to address this very important issue. There is also a very significant role to play for various non-government organizations, which we are also assisting in order to respond. We are examining the issue that the member raised very carefully.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the International Civil Aviation Organization reached an agreement on greener aircraft yesterday in Montreal.

At the same time, the federal government is still refusing to support the development of the greenest aircraft on the market, the Bombardier C Series plane. The Liberals are still talking out of both sides of their mouths when it comes to the environment, as they do when they claim to be supporting Quebec's economy.

When will the federal government stop undermining Quebec's economy, and when will it invest our money in Bombardier?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The Canadian government is a big backer of the aerospace industry, which generates much wealth in Canada by contributing \$28 billion to the economy and maintaining over 200,000 jobs. We will definitely continue our discussions with Bombardier because we want to reach an agreement. We must ensure that we keep jobs and research and development in Montreal.

HEALTH

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is cutting the increase in health transfers by half.

The minister told us that there is no point in investing more money in the health care system. I do not believe that she has visited hospital waiting rooms in Quebec, because she would have been shown that the situation is not acceptable. The Liberals have adopted the Conservatives' cuts of billions of dollars and, what is more, the NDP's standards.

Can the minister explain to Quebecers what they will get out of this?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of their publicly funded health care system, and they expect their governments to ensure it is always available to them.

Next year, the Canada health transfer will grow by more than \$1 billion, to over \$37 billion.

The Minister of Health will be meeting with her provincial and territorial counterparts in the coming weeks. We look forward to our continued discussion on how we can create a health care system that all Canadians can be proud of.

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●(1205)

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is still nothing for softwood lumber, nothing for Mégantic, nothing for diafiltered milk, and nothing for Bombardier. There is nothing for the people of Quebec. On health, the Liberals are maintaining the cuts made by the Harper government, and on the environment, they are maintaining the targets set by the Harper government. For Quebec, it is obvious: the Liberals have blown it.

Are the 40 Liberal members from Quebec trying to prove once again that, no matter who is in charge in Ottawa, Quebec's interests always come last?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government definitely enjoys strong representation in Quebec, with 40 members who are here to innovate for Canada and ensure the prosperity of Quebecers and all Canadians. I am proud to be part of the Quebec Liberal caucus.

We have nothing to learn from the Bloc Québécois on how to ensure that Quebec takes its place within Canada and prospers.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

TAXPAYERS' OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2015-16 Annual Report of the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman.

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[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 150 of the Financial Administration Act, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the Defence Construction Canada 2015-16 annual report on operations, and the Canada Lands Company Limited 2015-16 annual report on operations.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on International Trade in relation to Bill C-13, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, the Hazardous Products Act, the Radiation Emitting Devices Act, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, the Pest Control Products Act and the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act and to make related amendments to another act.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with an amendment.

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PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions on behalf of Canadians regarding impaired driving causing death.

Families for Justice is a group of Canadians who have had a loved one killed by an impaired driver. They believe that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient, and want the crime to be called what it is, "vehicular homicide".

Canadians are calling on the Government of Canada for mandatory sentencing for vehicular homicide, and for this Parliament to support Bill C-226, the impaired driving act.

● (1210)

JUSTICE

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted to stand here today and table this petition signed by so many people in my riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London in support of Cassie and Molly's law.

I cannot wait to actually support and move forward on the bill.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to present a petition signed by Canadians from Smithers, British Columbia, and southern Ontario.

The petitioners are concerned about the accessibility and impact of online sexual, violent, and degrading material, and the impacts on public health, especially on the well-being of women and girls. As such, these petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to adopt my motion, M-47.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a very thick petition today that is about human rights abuses in China.

In particular, this petition calls attention to the situation of the Falun Gong, one of the many groups that are horrendously persecuted by the Chinese government. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to undertake measures to address and combat forced organ harvesting, to publicly call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong, as well as to try to do more to stop the systematic murder and harassment of Falun Gong practitioners for the purposes of harvesting their organs.

I commend this very important petition on human rights in China to the consideration of the House.

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present e-petition no. 389, signed by hundreds of Canadians.

The petitioners are calling on members of Parliament to support my private member's bill, Bill C-241. Second reading will be on Monday, October 17. Bill C-241 seeks to amend the Excise Tax Act to refund 100% GST paid by Canadian school authorities.

SOMALILAND

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this petition asks the Government of Canada to recognize Somaliland as an independent country. The petition is signed by 295 Canadians.

Somaliland was a former British protectorate that won its independence in 1960. After an unsuccessful union with Somalia, the people of Somaliland declared independence in 1991. Over the last 25 years, Somaliland has established a new constitution, its own currency, and a central bank. Also, it has overseen the restoration of peace, established an independent judiciary, and cultivated a stable, multi-party democracy.

Government Orders

ANIMAL TROPHIES

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of over 500 of my constituents in London West to present a petition calling for a ban on the importation of animal trophies, mounted or unmounted. The petition can be found online. It is listed as petition e-229.

I took up the petition in response to something that came to light in London, Ontario. A father and son had paid \$150,000 to go on a trophy-hunting expedition in East Africa, where they killed two elephants. They wanted to bring home the tusks, ears, and skins of the animals, but the tusks were held up by Canada customs because of a paperwork issue.

I received many messages about this case from concerned Canadians who were disturbed to learn that it is still legal to import ivory and other exotic trophies into Canada. Because the animals we are talking about in this petition are a threatened and endangered species, it makes the act of killing them for sport unacceptable to many Canadians. The people in my riding of London West, and other ridings across the country, feel this issue needs to be resolved. That is why petitioners have turned to our government.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of many signatories, I am pleased to table a petition regarding Falun Gong, which is a traditional Chinese spiritual discipline that consists of meditation, exercises, and moral teachings based upon the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

In July 1999, the Chinese Communist Party launched a nationwide persecution campaign to eradicate Falun Gong. Millions of Falun Gong practitioners have been arrested and put into custody, many sentenced to long-term prison terms for up to 20 years, where torture and abuse are routine, and tens of thousands are feared dead, as a result.

The petitioners call upon Parliament in a public way to do what it can to condemn such action.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1215)
[English]

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. I believe we were at questions for the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her talk today on this piece of government legislation. One of the things she talked about often, and I mention it quite often in the House, is the fact that there is a shell game at play here by the Liberals.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, in introducing the bill, said that there will be no cost increase. In fact, he said there are no costs associated with the implementation of the bill. However, the bill does contain a royal recommendation, which effectively makes it a money bill. A royal recommendation is a procedure involving the Governor General that precedes the appropriation of any part of the public revenue or the imposition of any tax.

I would like to ask the opposition House leader, in her experience in this place, whether in fact she thinks that there will be money appropriated to the bill, based upon the fact that there is a royal recommendation in the bill.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question because it does give me the chance to talk about something that the government did not talk about, and in fact, sort of glossed over when it introduced the bill and spoke about it. That is the fact that there will indeed be additional costs because of the measures that are going to be taking place in the bill.

I think what we on this side are most frustrated about is that the Liberals are very good at spending money. There is no doubt about that. They like to tax and they like to spend. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the bill has additional spending measures in it.

However, what we are most concerned about is that it takes away from regional representation. It takes away from regional representation in the form of taking away regional ministers, by practice, and it takes away from having ministers oversee the regional economic development agencies.

They are being very quiet about that. They are not talking a lot about the new ministerial positions that are going to be filled. They are not talking about the additional cost to the Treasury. It is interesting that they are avoiding any discussion about those things, but those are the things that we are concerned about and will continue to talk about.

Government Orders

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the NDP critic for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, I share the concerns raised by the member about the impact of this bill on the efficiency of our economic development and diversification agencies.

I had a chance this summer to travel for two weeks across New Brunswick, P.E.I., Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. I met with ACOA staff, who shared with me their concerns about the effects of this change on the way that economic diversification is working.

Prior to this change we had a bottom-up approach in which the staff understood the needs of the regions and were carrying those needs up to their minister for developing solutions. They fear that the centralized structure now is more of a top-down approach, in which the minister and his staff are deciding what will be taking place for the regions. Those local staff are now becoming agents for implementing those decisions coming from higher up. They starting to see this happening.

What are the member's comments on the concerns of these ACOA staff?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the NDP for doing his job and bringing those concerns forward. This is exactly our major concern about not only the Atlantic Canada agency but also the agencies for western economic diversification, Quebec, and the north. Six of the regional development agencies will be affected if the bill passes. We will not have regional representation. There will be one minister from Toronto answering directly to the Prime Minister, who does not understand the regions and their specific needs. He does not understand what is happening on the ground. He might have the best of intentions, but it is wrong to do it, and it begs the question of what is next. Are the Liberals now going to cut these agencies? Is this step one, where first they cut the ministers and then cut the agencies?

We have seen a disturbing pattern with the Liberals' disregard of Atlantic Canada. They have 32 members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada. They swept Atlantic Canada but are ignoring the region when it comes to the Supreme Court. They are thumbing their noses at Atlantic Canada. There is great concern that the Liberals' next step will be to formally cut the ministers themselves, which they are trying to do right now very quietly, and which they did not even mention in their speeches. We know this is what they will do. Will their next step then be to cut these important economic development agencies themselves? On this side of the House, we will fight tooth and nail to not let that happen to the people in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, northern Canada, or western Canada. They are avoiding it.

• (1220)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will not have to fight tooth and nail, because the Western Economic Diversification Canada, ACOA and our other regional development agencies will be there well into the future. The Prime Minister has been clear on that point.

There are a couple of other issues. There are no incremental costs associated with the current ministry. The ministers who are currently appointed as ministers of state receive the same salary as their

cabinet colleagues and have office budgets commensurate with their responsibilities. This will not change under the legislation.

The third point deals with the size of cabinet. Members need to realize that Stephen Harper, as the member would know, had a larger cabinet. This does not mean that we will have a larger cabinet. I shared that information in my opening remarks on behalf of the government House leader.

Does what I have just said provide some assurances that this legislation is worth supporting?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, the answer to my hon. colleague's question is no.

With respect to whether it requires royal assent, as the debate continues we will be able to show clearly that there will be extra funds required. Is that our chief reason for opposing this bill? No, it is not. It is clear that the Liberals like to spend, and they will spend money on this.

The member's reassurance that the government will not cut the regional economic development agencies is cold comfort. It is the same government that said that it would not introduce new taxes. It is the same government that said it would only incur a \$10 billion deficit. It is the same government that has changed its mind over and over again. It has said that it would work with the provinces on things like a carbon tax. Now it is saying that it will impose it.

The regions of Atlantic Canada that have come to count on ACOA, and the regions in western Canada and northern Canada that count on their agencies, should watch carefully because the Liberals will first cut their ministers and put all of the responsibility in the hands of one minister and the Prime Minister. Next, they might very well cut the economic development agencies themselves. Therefore, we do not take comfort in it, and we are sticking to our position on this.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-24 is an interesting bill. Ostensibly, it sets out to address a gender wage gap in cabinet by doing two things: changing or limiting the current title of "minister of state" to "minister", and then paying all ministers the same salary. It would also create three new placeholder cabinet positions to be filled and defined at the pleasure of the Prime Minister.

This bill would also remove the heads of regional economic development agencies from the Salaries Act, which means that while ministers could still be the head of regional development agencies, the head of such agencies would not necessarily be styled as ministers.

At first blush, this bill seems innocuous and maybe laudable. However, upon closer examination, this bill raises some important questions, which New Democrats hope the government will be able to answer. The first question is why the bill is necessary.

Government Orders

There are currently two levels or tiers of ministers. Full regular ministers are heads of their respective departments. Here I refer to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of National Defence, and Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, etc., all of whom happen to be men. Then there is a second tier of ministers, previously called “ministers of state”, who have the title of minister, but their responsibilities are unchanged. We have the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the Minister of Status of Women; and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, all of whom happen to be women.

While Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the Minister of Status of Women; and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities are all important, these ministries have historically not been accorded the same status, level of responsibility, or scope of mandate as the ministries of finance, defence, and immigration. In fact, the minister of state designation has been seen largely as a post of a more junior minister.

I would like to share with my colleagues one definition. A minister of state is a more junior cabinet minister in the Canadian cabinet and is usually given specific responsibilities to a senior cabinet minister in a specific area. While it is a noble goal to achieve gender parity in cabinet, as it is in all things, the way that this is done also has to be fair, equitable, defensible, and transparent.

When the newly minted cabinet was sworn in last year, it was heralded and greeted with much enthusiasm. There was lots of congratulations to go around, but then a news story revealed that of the 15 men and 15 women in the new cabinet, five of the women and none of the men were assigned to be ministers of state. Those five ministers are the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, who reports to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, who also reports to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the Minister of Status of Women, who works under the Minister of Canadian Heritage; the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, who also works under the Minister of Canadian Heritage; and the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, who supports the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

A senior government spokesperson clarified that these ministers of state were already considered full ministers and that all that remained was for the government to change the Treasury Board statute to reflect this new development. However, she also stated:

...making these five women full ministers does not mean their portfolios will take on the size of full departments. They are serviced by other departments in the same way they always have been, but they have the full standing and authority of any other minister around the table.

I believe that cabinet should reflect our society and that having 50% of it consisting of women ministers is great. However, if five of those women ministers are, in effect, junior ministers appointed to assist full ministers, then is there really truly a cabinet of equals? Three of the five junior ministers would be assisting their male ministers.

This bill then aims to bump up the salaries of these junior ministers to the same level as full ministers' salaries, despite these ministers not having a full ministry or department to oversee, nor the scope of responsibilities. Therefore, is this fair? Is it equitable to

have equal pay for unequal work, scope, and responsibility? Is this a case of pay equity or is this bill just a way for the government to make good on its claim of gender parity in cabinet?

• (1225)

This is not to say that paying women more and fairly is a bad thing. In fact, the NDP has been fighting for pay equity for decades. Canadian women have been fighting for, and waiting for, pay equity for a very long time.

Pay equity, as my colleagues know, was established as a fundamental human right in 1977. Since then, working women in Canada have had unequal access to fair pay.

Some provincial jurisdictions have established pay equity commissions, and the women in those jurisdictions are enjoying a modicum of equality with their male colleagues when it comes to equal pay for work of equal value. I am sad to say, however, that too many working women are still waiting on this day.

On Wednesday, the government tabled its response to the report of the Special Committee on Pay Equity, announcing that it recognized that pay equity is a human right. In fact, the report of the committee was entitled, “It’s Time to Act”. Unfortunately, the government clearly does not believe it is time to act. Instead, it announced that notwithstanding the fact pay equity is a human right, Canadian women would have to wait another two years before the government introduces legislation, let alone implements it.

I had the privilege of serving on that special committee, and I can tell members that expert witnesses testified there was no reason to wait. There was broad consensus among all witnesses that pay equity is a human right and should not be subject to collective bargaining. There was also consensus the current complaint-based system is not accessible to everyone, but costly and time-consuming for those who do have access, and that it is effectively denying fairness and justice through the delays that can stretch for decades. As people know, some women have died before being able to get their pay equity settlement.

Canadian women have been waiting too long for the right to pay equity to be realized, and there should not be any more delays. We need proactive pay equity legislation to achieve pay equity legislation, and the 2004 task force report provides an excellent template for that legislation.

Some of my colleagues in the House will remember that the 2004 task force on pay equity conducted an extensive review of this issue and that its report has been recognized internationally as one of the most comprehensive and authoritative works on pay equity ever done. The task force consulted widely and produced a list of recommendations that is still relevant and valid.

Government Orders

In 2005, the Standing Committee for the Status of Women studied this report and asked the Liberal government of the day to introduce legislation immediately. Unfortunately, that did not happen and, regrettably, the current government has also decided to punt the issue ahead.

I cannot fully express my profound disappointment with the cynicism that the current government and its ministers have shown in their response to the committee report. Asking Canadian women to wait another two years is unconscionable, and its commitment to bring in legislation in 2018 just prior to an election is a shameful ploy to hold the rights of working women ransom. It is like saying “Yes, we acknowledge that you have a right to equal pay for work of equal value and it has been neglected, and although we have the power to fix this injustice right away, we won't. We will make lofty claims about being a feminist government and promise to bring in legislation in a couple of years, just in time for you to vote us in again so we can actually do what we should and could have done right now”.

The government is asking women to endure two more years of being paid approximately 70¢ of every dollar that their male counterparts earn. That is 30% less buying power for women to spend in the economy. It is 30% less to pay for rent, food, child care, education, and to invest in their pensions. It is even worse for women who are from indigenous or racialized communities, and those living with disabilities. This inequality contributes to a much lower standard of living for women, and its effects are brought forward to the next generation.

As Kate McInturff, one of the learned witnesses who appeared before the committee, testified:

• (1230)

Today in Canada our daughters are as likely to attend university as our sons are, but we are in danger of failing to deliver on the promise of education, because those girls will grow up and graduate to a pay gap—unless we act now. Karma doesn't cut it. Doing nothing, leaving pay to the forces of the market, gives us what we have today, a widening gap between men's and women's rates of pay. Let me repeat that: the gap in men's and women's full-time wages is growing right now in Canada, not shrinking.

I asked Dr. McInturff if she agreed that pay equity legislation is an important step in eliminating the gender wage gap, that we should not have to wait to get everything right, and that we could actually start to have an impact on women's lives if we had, at the very least, federal pay equity legislation. This was her response:

Well, yes, clearly I think we need to act sooner rather than later.

....But, really, when we're talking about a life-threatening impact, we have to think about the women who make up two-thirds of minimum wage workers. A pay gap for a retail worker who is making \$12,000 to \$13,000 a year, can really mean the difference between food and rent or not. That's why I would urge the committee to act on this, because addressing it has a really substantial impact on the quality of life of the lowest-earning women in the country.

When we consider Bill C-24, which will add \$20,000 to the salaries of some of the highest-earning women in Canada, I really need to wonder about the priorities of the government. The bill would adjust the wages, and put it into the act, of five of the most well-paid women in Canada. The legislation was drawn up very quickly and brought to the House so we could pass it. However, millions of working women in Canada who earn far less are being told they have to wait for their wages to be adjusted. Where is the fairness?

Bill C-24 appears to be a cosmetic fix for a problem created by the Prime Minister. Claims of a truly gender-equal cabinet were trumpeted far and wide, but when it was pointed out that some of the women, and only women, who made up this gender-balanced cabinet were actually junior ministers, being paid at a junior minister's salary level, the government had to do some damage control, and this bill is the result.

The bill, unfortunately, ignores the clear difference in responsibility conferred on women in the Prime Minister's cabinet. If the Prime Minister truly believes in and wants to equalize the status of government ministers, as the bill purports to do, then all he needs to do is appoint an equal number of men and women as full ministers and an equal number of men and women as ministers of state. It seems simple enough. There is no need to mess with salary levels or artificially inflate the salaries of junior ministers to elevate them to the status of full ministers.

Interestingly, though, all five ministers of state who will see a \$20,000 raise with the passage of the bill are women. It would almost seem as though the junior minister positions were not good enough for men.

However, the Liberal approach to fixing a problem of their own making is counterproductive, because it ignores the principles of pay equity: equal pay for work of equal value, and equal opportunity to perform roles with greater responsibilities.

Real gender parity in cabinet means appointing an equal number of women to be department heads or full ministers. By papering over the distinction between ministers of state and full ministers, the Prime Minister is prioritizing the equality of compensation over the equality of responsibility with respect to gender parity in his government.

I would respectfully submit that observing the principles of pay equality and equal opportunity is the appropriate way to eliminate the gender pay gap that currently exists in cabinet.

The second area of concern is the removal of the heads of the regional economic development agencies from the Salaries Act. This means that while different ministers could still be heads of the various agencies, no one could be a minister simply by virtue of being a head of a regional economic development agency. Again, it sounds innocuous, but what this really amounts to is the neutering of these agencies.

Government Orders

•(1235)

Canadians value the contributions of these agencies to their economic development, and these regions are best served by having someone with local expertise at the helm of their respective agencies. Bill C-24 would diminish the role of the regional economic development ministers around the cabinet table, and at present rolls them up under the purview of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. How does it make sense that six diverse economic development portfolios, representing six different geographical regions, be grouped under one minister?

When one visits the Government of Canada's website for regional development agencies across Canada, this is what it states:

Regional Development Agencies across Canada help to address key economic challenges by providing regionally-tailored programs, services, knowledge and expertise that:

- Build on regional and local economic assets and strengths;
- Support business growth, productivity and innovation;
- Help small- and medium-sized businesses effectively compete in the global marketplace;
- Provide adjustment assistance in response to economic downturns and crises; and
- Support communities.

Each Regional Development Agency brings a regional policy perspective in support of the national agenda through: regional economic intelligence to support national decision-making; contributing to federal regional coordination and cooperative relationships with other levels of government, community and research institutions, and other stakeholders; and supporting national priorities in regions.

Getting rid of regional oversight and autonomy of these economic development agencies is another example of top-down government. However, perhaps it is just another step toward placing these agencies on the chopping block. In the past, the agencies had full-time ministers or ministers of state, or the portfolio was attached to a specific minister from the region who carried other cabinet responsibilities.

Federal agencies directly deliver and administer hundreds of millions of dollars to help spur on regional economic development. For example, ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, which was the first agency created by the federal government, had a budget last year of \$298.6 million. Its former president has publicly mused that “the future of these agencies could be in peril without having permanent ministers advocating on their behalf”. He also said, “This is going to be low-hanging fruit. It is a lot tougher to abolish an agency that has a minister, particularly if that is the minister's only job, than it is to abolish an agency that is essentially an agency of public servants.”

I wonder what the real intent is for regional development agencies. Would it be helpful for members, as well as the people in those regions, to learn what the government's plan is for the future of economic development in their areas?

Finally, the third area of concern I have is that Bill C-24 gives the prime minister the ability to add three new or additional ministers at his discretion, without giving us an idea of what those positions might be or who might occupy them. It seems like another example of the government, despite its promises of transparency and open government, setting up another avenue to do just what it wants without proper, or any, oversight. In the spirit of transparency and accountability, I invite the government to tell the House exactly what

these positions would be. Members could then make an informed decision.

In summary, Bill C-24 presents more questions than answers. I hope the government will see fit to be more forthcoming in the days to come about the details and the intended consequences of the bill.

•(1240)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to comment not as much on the member's speech but on a previous speech. It is related to the regional development agencies, particularly in the north. I probably have more experience than anyone in the House here on that, because my career before I came to the House was working on regional economic development for the department that housed those agencies.

Without talking in philosophical terms but just on the effect on the ground, I can say that in this particular case right now this is the most effective minister and relationship we have ever had. Totally in contrast to what the previous member opposite had suggested, which was that it impinged our relationship, in fact it has increased it greatly.

We have some wonderful projects. He has been easy to access. Just a couple of days ago I asked for some information and I got it within two days. We had a great group from the north come down, and on short notice the minister met with them all. The relationship has been working very well, in a practical and a functional way. It may be related to personalities but it is certainly much better than it was before.

If they want to talk about the philosophical or technical reason, perhaps there is a benefit to having a senior minister of innovation who has a lot of knowledge and access to other areas of economic development for the various regions and who can see the best practices of all the agencies. That may be a benefit to having it under one roof.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, some of my hon. colleague's comments support what I was saying here.

The point is that in order to keep that profile and in order to keep those economic development agencies a part of the government's policies and budget, those particular regions of the country need a voice that has come from the ground up and that keeps the government making relevant decisions based on what those regional differences are. What I see in this act, and I am asking for clarification, is that rolling everything up under one minister is not a good way to keep those distinct voices around the table, particularly during a time when there are big differences in economics and regional economic development.

Government Orders

We need distinct voices around the table and it is my concern that the bill would reduce that influence at the cabinet table. Of course we have heard that some people think they are going to go away altogether and it will just be subsumed in a big government department. Being from Saskatoon, I can speak to the fact that a regional, western economic diversification-type of language and voice at the government table is something we really want. We have always been proud of it and it makes us feel that there is a voice there speaking on our behalf.

● (1245)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the member for her great speech, discussing all of the different components, and for her question and answer for the member from across.

I am going to pick up on the gender equality part here. I know that this member has worked hard to make sure that there is gender equality. I have heard her questions in the House, and when it comes to gender equality this is a member who talks loudly and clearly about it. I would like to commend her on that. However, she is saying that there is an issue with this.

I know when this comes out, we will hear that the Conservatives once again voted against equality, but the member is also indicating that this is not about equality because it really is not equal work for equal pay. I just wonder if I could get some comments on that because I look at this member as being an advocate for those women. Could she share that with me?

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I am never going to stand up to say there is something wrong with paying people a fair wage, an equitable wage based on the effort, the scope, and the responsibility of a job.

I know for a fact there are women who are working for less than men but with the same responsibilities and their jobs having the same scope. That is discrimination. That is a human rights issue. This particular bill undermines some of the fundamentals of equal pay for work of equal value.

We have a government that on Wednesday said that even though it is 2016 and people have a human right to equal pay for work of equal value, they are going to make people wait two more years, although not one witness said we needed to wait two more years. On Wednesday, we were waiting. As I stated, working women are really struggling because they are not getting paid equal pay for work of equal value.

Then we have a government that is very quickly saying that the ministers in question will have the same title. It is going to give them the same title, but not change any of the responsibilities or scope of the positions. It is going to pay them more and change the title. I just feel very disrespected by that. I do not want that to come out as how equal pay for work of equal value is done. It is not.

It does a disservice to all those women who have struggled long and hard, some of them in long court cases and others in fact having died before getting their compensation. The member and I may not agree on this part, but the government has its priorities screwed up.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has had pay equity legislation for some 20 years. There are women in Quebec who are benefiting from this type of legislation. The federal government just announced that it intends to wait another two years. It introduced Bill C-24 and called it equity.

I would like to know if my colleague thinks this is just a gimmick, a way for the Liberals to convince us that they truly believe in pay equity when they do not. This is not a real plan for pay equity.

In fact, I thought I heard the Liberals say that this would take two years because of the costs involved and because of the need for consultation. What they are forgetting is that, for decades, women have been bearing the brunt of pay inequity by being denied fair wages. The Liberals are failing to take that into consideration.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised the issue of the two largest provinces in this country having pay equity. We heard from them at committee. It would not take two years to write that legislation. We have a lot of experience.

As my colleague mentioned, making these women wait longer and then having this bill come forward under the guise of pay equity is beyond disappointing. It is disconcerting. I do not feel good about it.

The government had an opportunity. We had a special committee. We looked back at the 2004 task force. Witness after witness said it was the best report in the world. We have the template. We could have moved forward. I am very disappointed that the government has not taken the lead.

Then, just on the heels of saying that it is going to take two more years, it has brought this bill forward under the guise of its somehow being some sort of pay equity or equal pay type of legislation. It is very disappointing. I would like the government to reconsider and move forward on pay equity for the middle class, the group of people it often champions, and to bring pay equity legislation for those women sooner rather than later—and definitely before 2018.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise to continue the debate on Bill C-24.

This is a particularly curious approach we have from the government. I wish I could say an unusual approach from the government, but certainly still a curious one.

Government Orders

Here we are on Friday afternoon, a time when I think many members of the government think MPs should actually not be working, debating a salary increase for government ministers. The Liberals have proposed a bill that would increase the salary for some members of the cabinet. I am sure they were thinking about how they could justify their desire to get paid more. To justify that, they said it was about gender equality. This is an argument that does a great disservice to the real issues of gender equality in this country. The legislation is very clear in terms of what it says and does. It is about increasing the salary for particular positions within the cabinet.

It is unfortunate. I will say this, having had the opportunity to sub on the status of women committee a couple of times in the last two weeks, I have seen the important work that the committee does, and indeed the very real issues we have in this country around status of women and around gender equality. This is not an argument that should be misused when what is actually going on is people trying to pursue their own political individual interests, which are not at all related to substantive issues of equality.

We see this strategy in fact frequently from the Liberals. They invoke the position of disadvantaged groups when actually they are trying to do something that is entirely, transparently, about their own interests. It comes at a time when I think many Canadians are losing their jobs, especially in my province of Alberta, at a time when it is hard to justify people who are already doing well, government ministers, getting the pay increase that is proposed by this piece of legislation, Bill C-24.

That is the context here. We have the legislation coming forward, a pay increase for ministers, and I think it is designed in a way that plays this unfortunate game of sleight of hand.

Already we have had one speech from the government, but already the Liberals have foregone a speaking slot, so I am concerned that not only is the legislation being argued for in a misleading and an incorrect way, but many government members do not even have the heart to stand up and defend it.

For those who are watching, let me shape the conversation a little by describing the context in which the bill occurs. Members of the House, as members of Parliament, receive a base salary, but there are a number of different positions where there is an additional salary component that reflects additional responsibilities that members have. They include you, Mr. Speaker, and they include, of course, the Prime Minister at the highest level.

Ministers get a certain salary top-up and ministers of state are at a different level. Just to explain the difference, there is an important substantive distinction in our system between the functions of ministers and the functions of ministers of state. Although generally speaking, they are all thought of as being members of the cabinet, they all take the associated oath, they are all given the honorific, “the honourable”, and they are at that level of being in the Privy Council, they have distinctly different functions.

A full minister within our system of Westminster government is responsible for a whole department, whereas a minister of state has specific areas of responsibility but their function is to assist the minister who is responsible for administering the department. Very clearly, we have two different kinds of ministers. Yes, both are

important. Yes, they both sit in cabinet and receive salary top-ups, but different kinds of salary top-ups.

Then we have that whole hierarchy working through the system. There is the Prime Minister, the cabinet ministers, and the ministers of state, and then parliamentary secretaries and committee chairs, who receive a salary top-up but not as much as what ministers of state get. Then there are other positions in the House that may include one or two people who then receive an additional top-up as well. If we look across the system, of course all members of Parliament are in some sense equal. However, for the purposes of our debate and deliberations here, we are not equal in terms of our level of authority or level of responsibility.

• (1255)

It goes without saying that there are some people here who have different kinds of administrative responsibilities within government. Therefore, they are paid at a different level because it reflects the additional role or responsibility they have.

Some of the members who have asked questions, or the original mover of this bill, people from the government side, have suggested that in the Liberal cabinet all ministers are equal. That may sound nice, but administratively it is nonsense. To suggest that every single department within the government is of equal importance to the lives of Canadians, that every minister has the same degree of administrative responsibility, that every department is as important as each other, without intending any disrespect, of course, to some of the departments, it is very clear that some do matter more.

To start with, most other ministers, for almost anything they would want to do, would have to ensure that they have the funding from the Minister of Finance. Therefore, there is clearly some, both formal and informal hierarchy, that exists in any cabinet. That is most clearly evident in the distinctions that exist between ministers and ministers of state. I want to underline that this is very much still the case with the current cabinet.

I had the honour of working as a staffer in the previous government, so I have some understanding of how this works at the administrative level. However, the government cannot say its cabinet works differently. In fact, I have the orders in council from November 4 that effectively created the positions of ministers, and within the government there are five ministers of state. In each case, they are not called ministers of state. The Standing Orders said they were to be styled something else, in other words, the naming of the minister is something different. They clearly list not only the fact that the minister in question is a minister of state, but refer to the fact that their responsibilities are involved in assisting the full minister for each department.

That is how ministers of state work. They do not have their own departments. They have specific responsibilities, but the nature of those responsibilities are that they involve assisting the minister who does have full responsibility for that area. I will read directly from the orders in council. I cannot give the names of the ministers, but there are five.

Government Orders

It states, “a minister of state to be styled minister of la Francophonie, to assist the minister of foreign affairs in the carrying out of that minister's responsibilities”. Very clearly, in the order in council, the instruction is to assist the full Minister of Foreign Affairs in the carrying out of the minister's responsibility.

The next one says, “a minister of state to be styled minister of status of women, to assist the minister of Canadian heritage in the carrying out of that minister's responsibilities”. Very clearly, in the orders in council, it is not put at an equal level of the full cabinet, as I have explained.

Then we have, “a minister of state to be styled minister of sport and persons with disabilities, to assist the minister of Canadian heritage and the minister of employment and social development in the carrying out of those ministers' responsibilities”.

Next, “a minister of state to be styled minister of small business and tourism, to assist the minister of industry in the carrying out of that minister's responsibilities”.

Finally, “a minister of state to be styled minister of science, to assist the minister of industry in the carrying out of that minister's responsibilities”.

This is from the current cabinet on November 4. After the election, there was the appointment of these five ministers of state, who are styled or labelled, not as ministers of state, but very clearly, according to the orders in council, are ministers of state, and in fact functioning at a different level from the full ministers. It is clearly indicated within the orders in council which minister they are responsible to report to, in one case to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in another case to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, and then in two cases to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

It could not be more clear that we still have what we have always had, and perhaps always will have in our system, which are different levels of ministers. However, I will say this, as well, to the government. If the government were really committed to equalizing the salaries of ministers, why did they not lower the salaries of the full ministers to the level of ministers of state, or at least find some level in between?

I see members across the way shaking their heads. It is, of course, outrageous that we would consider lowering the salaries of ministers of the government, and I am not proposing that. I am just saying that if the intention of the government was equalization, it is interesting that the route they are following is that it has to give everyone an increase.

• (1300)

I worry that the parliamentary secretaries are soon going to speak up and say “Aren't we equal too? Shouldn't we be at the same level as the ministers?”

This is precisely the problem. We are talking about different levels of work, but premised on this entirely false notion of equality that seeks to equalize the pay for positions that are, in fact, clearly different, that clearly involve different levels of responsibility.

While this provides the government with a great opportunity to, yes, on a Friday afternoon, propose and defend legislation, or if the Liberals continue their current track record of not putting forward speakers, not to defend legislation, designed to increase the amount of money that cabinet ministers are earning.

Again, I come back to what the government's defence is of this rather absurd approach that it is taking. The Liberals are trying to make this about gender. Again, this does a great disservice to the very real issues of gender equality in this country that require urgent action. Instead, their focus is on increasing the pay of some cabinet ministers and making it about, supposedly, a gender issue. Here are the facts when it comes to gender in the current cabinet.

When the Prime Minister appointed his cabinet, we heard about his much-promoted commitment to gender parity. At the time of appointment, there were 15 women in cabinet and 16 men, including the Prime Minister. Now, that is not parity to begin with, 15 women and 16 men, because the Prime Minister himself is very much a member of cabinet. He has additional seniority and responsibilities, obviously, but he sits as part of the cabinet. Therefore, from the start we already did not have gender parity within the cabinet.

However, we found out, and it is clear from the order in council, that there were ministers of state, as there always has been, five of which were women. Now, the cabinet was not appointed by anyone other than the Prime Minister. Presumably, he knew what he was doing. He knew that he was creating a cabinet that not only did not have equality among the 31 ministers, but also that five of the ministers in that cabinet would be appointed to a different tier. He should have known clearly what the difference was in the nature of those positions and their functions.

In terms of the full ministers, not ministers of state, the original Liberal cabinet had 16 men and 10 women, which means that 38% of the full cabinet were women. Now, 38% of the current cabinet are women versus 30% at the end of the last Conservative government. That is an increase, but it certainly does not deserve the claim of gender parity, as was much asserted by the Prime Minister and other members of his team.

Of course, the government was criticized for the disconnect between what its members were saying on the one hand, and what they were doing on the other. This has been a common criticism of the current government: the disconnect between the things its members are saying and things they are doing. It is no clearer than in this particular case.

The Liberals said they would fix it by pretending that ministers of state were in fact full ministers, but that was a pretense. As I have explained very clearly, the orders in council, the structure of the way government works, is that ministers of state do not run departments, and their function is to assist the full minister responsible for those areas in carrying out of their functions

That would not change with the legislation before us. The fact that the legislation introduces a pay increase for those ministers does not at all change the fundamental reality of the way our system works. Even to the extent that they were trying to fix this problem, this disconnect between their claims of gender parity and the reality of their cabinet means they have not actually addressed it at all.

Government Orders

I suggest that there was a much clearer, simpler way for them to have done this. They could have shuffled their cabinet if they wanted to have that full equality, that actual parity. They could have appointed an equal number of male and female full ministers, and an equal number of male and female ministers of state. Again, no one else appoints the cabinet but the Prime Minister. It was his choice to claim gender parity, on the one hand, but to appoint all of the women within that cabinet to a clearly junior tier, on the other hand.

● (1305)

Renaming the ministers, calling them something else, and increasing their pay does not change the fact that they have lesser administrative responsibilities, that they still have to be reporting to another minister in the context of the carrying out of their duties. This is what we have. We have a salary increase bill for cabinet ministers dressed up in the name of equality.

I want to talk, then, about some other aspects of the bill in the remaining time that I have, because there is the issue, as well, of changing the way the regional ministers work and of changing the way in which regional economic development agencies are administered.

This formalizes a change of the government from the way things have worked in the past. Historically, and when I was a political staffer, the system we had was that there were regional ministers from each area who, in addition to being responsible for certain functions of government, had a particular responsibility for certain regions. They played an important role within the cabinet advocating for the perspective of their region. This was obviously important.

Despite the great intentions a person may have, it is difficult to fully understand and appreciate what the challenges are in, say, Alberta, if he or she does not live in, or come from, or have some kind of a personal connection to Alberta. That is a reality. It is no guarantee that someone from that region will actually represent the interests of their region, as we have seen from members opposite from Alberta voting against key energy infrastructure projects.

However, generally speaking, it is still important to have that kind of regional representation dimension and, also, for regional economic development agencies to have a minister from that region who is responsible for administering that economic development agency, someone who understands the realities of the circumstances and who has a real appreciation of what the economic development needs are. That regional representation, not only within the House of Commons but also within cabinet, and the formalization of that, not just through having the ministers from different regions but having ministers with specific regional responsibilities, which include economic development, has been part of our long history of trying to, through our institutions, structure things so that we are bringing our country together and ensuring that every part of this country has a clear voice at the table. That regional knowledge they bring in is of great importance.

Unfortunately, with these changes with the structure of the cabinet we have, that has been lost. As other members have pointed out many times, we have a minister who represents a constituency in Mississauga who is responsible for all of the economic development agencies across the country. I do not doubt that he is a capable person, but to expect one person to have a full appreciation of the

economic development needs of all these different regions in which he does not live and does not represent, is incredibly unrealistic and it leaves those regions without effective representation at the cabinet table.

I think we see this in a number of different issues where the needs of Alberta are being ignored. The historical prerogatives of Atlantic Canada, in the context of Supreme Court representation, are being ignored. We see the outworkings of this lack of regional representation within the government.

Let me say, as well, that having that regional minister responsible for regional economic development plays an important accountability function. It means that people who have concerns, maybe, or suggestions with respect to the activity of regional economic development agencies, things that are very important to the regions in which they operate in terms of at least the way they are seen in those areas, can go to a regional minister who represents those agencies and have that conversation, push back, and hold the person accountable, perhaps, if the way he or she is proceeding is not seen as being in the interests of the region.

Without that function, the local administration really comes down to, not a minister but public servants. Public servants, of course, have a great deal of expertise, but they are not politically accountable in the same way that ministers are.

We are losing out on that regional dimension, as well, and that is unfortunate.

I am very opposed to the bill because, again, I do not see, in the current economic circumstances, especially, any justification for increasing ministerial salaries. The government is trying to get around a political problem of the Prime Minister's own making by paying some people more.

● (1310)

Again, if he wanted to have gender parity in his cabinet, all he had to do was shuffle his cabinet. He has chosen not to do that but to instead put this window dressing on with a salary increase. That is not the right way to go. It costs Canadians too much. That is why I am opposing this bill.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I quite often enjoy that minister's, that member's, speeches. He shows a very good grasp of the issues. However, on this, I think he is out of focus.

He says that things can be adjusted simply through a cabinet shuffle. Now, in our B.C. caucus, we have two excellent ministers, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities and the Minister of National Defence. I would not want to see them in the opposite jobs. In fact, we are drawing on their expertise and their intelligence in their portfolios to do precisely the job that is needed.

What is really key here, and what I would like the member to respond to, is why a government should not treat the objectives of both those ministers as equally important.

Government Orders

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for initially promoting me to a minister in his question. This perhaps underlines the difference between the roles. Seriously, I appreciate the member's kind words.

This is not about individual ministers. I have no doubt that the government is thus far happy with the performance of the ministers he mentioned. Obviously, both of them bring some specific knowledge to the portfolios they have.

At the same time, it is not an insult to either of them to suggest that there are differences of kind and of nature between those two different functions. It is not to diminish the importance of either to say, as well, that the administrative structure is different.

The member mentioned, for example, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. As I mentioned, that minister, clearly within the orders in council, has responsibilities that involve assisting the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour in terms of those ministerial responsibilities. The way she administers those areas is different from the way the Minister of National Defence administers his areas. The orders in council for the Minister of National Defence do not refer to him assisting anyone else. He is responsible, fully, for administering the activities of the defence department.

These are just clear differences. I say to the government members that it is not to diminish any member here to say that there are different levels of responsibility and influence. That is just a reality. To suggest that all cabinet ministers, the ministers of state as well senior ministers, do the same thing and have the same level of authority just does not reflect the reality of how our system of government works.

• (1315)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was born and raised in Ontario, but my dad was born in Saskatchewan. I will always have an affinity for Saskatchewan.

I want to join my colleague in acknowledging that after having been around for a while, one of the things we do in a new Parliament is kind of look around and see where the rising stars are. I do not think there is any doubt that the hon. member will find himself moving up the benches very quickly. I expect an illustrious career for him.

On a sort of man bites dog story, I am looking to see if the member and I agree on something, because I think we do. Let me pose something, if I may, very briefly, and then see if the member agrees that we are seeing it the same way. If not, he can show me where we are differing.

In terms of ministers of state, if we had male and female ministers of state who were being paid two different rates, and that was being fixed, that would be a pay equity issue. However, what we are talking about here is a full-line minister, and I have been one provincially, who has responsibilities for a full ministry and department, versus a minister of state, who is sort of an assistant minister.

What is really going on is that this is an attempt to fix a bit of problem the government made for itself by bragging about the

number of women it had and putting them in the lower positions. When it got called on it, this was the fix.

Do we see this issue the same way?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I really have to thank my friend for the very kind remarks. I was not planning on donating to his leadership campaign before, but now I may have to give it some thought.

It is very clear that it is not a pay equity issue when there is different pay for fundamentally different functions. The Prime Minister is paid more than his ministers of state. Nobody suggests that it is a pay equity problem. To be the Prime Minister is clearly different from being a minister of state. What I have pointed out is that there is also a similar difference in terms of the administrative reality for full ministers and ministers of state.

Again, the member is quite right to say that this is not about pay equity. This is rather about the government trying to suggest that the ministers are the same in order to fix a political problem of its own making. Again, there would be a simpler political fix for it. Well, maybe it would be simpler in some respects and not in others. They could simply shuffle the cabinet, if that is what they are aiming for.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader stated that all ministers are now being paid at the same level, but the bill has not been passed in Parliament. On what authority are those increases being paid, and what does that say about the government's respect for the law in Parliament?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, at some point, I hope we will get an answer to that question from the government.

It is worth underlining, as one of my colleagues pointed out, that although the parliamentary secretary said the bill does not entail any additional cost, it does involve a royal recommendation, which is precisely the indicator that there is an expenditure of dollars associated with it. It cannot be both ways. If there is a royal recommendation associated with the bill, it means the government anticipates there will be associated costs. There is a clear disconnect there. These are questions the government is going to have to answer in terms of what the bill would actually do.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I often enjoy the comments of the hon. member from Saskatchewan, but today in one of his responses to a question he got up and said that he did not want to make this personal and then spent a good part of his speech talking about the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and asking how he could pretend to represent all the regions of the country or do a good job as regional minister if he is not from that region.

That sounds like a personal attack because he does not ask the same question of, let us say, the Minister of Environment, who has responsibility for other departments such as national parks, even though there might not be a national park in that particular minister's riding, or the Minister of Finance, who might be the person who sets the fiscal framework for the government and has a clear indication of what types of budgets they would have in different departments, but does not come from all parts of the country.

Government Orders

I am not certain what he is trying to say. On one hand he is saying it is impersonal, yet his argument would belie that fact.

• (1320)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear again. My argument was specifically about the importance of regional representation, especially in the context of economic development agencies.

I raised the issue of the minister in question, the Minister of Innovation, because he is the minister who now is, unfortunately in my judgment, responsible for administering all of these different economic development agencies. It is not a comment on the job he is doing, but a comment on the reality that he is not from western Canada, nor Atlantic Canada. He represents a constituency in Mississauga. I do not think it is any personal insult to the minister to point out that reality.

I would not make a very good regional minister for Atlantic Canada because I represent a constituency in Alberta. To suggest the importance of regional representation at the cabinet table in the context of economic development and political accountability, that is not a personal insult. It is a reality. It would be better for the government members to actually engage with that argument and try to explain to us why regional representation is not important. However, they have not even acknowledged that aspect of the bill. We have not heard any acknowledgement or arguments as to why it is okay to not have regional representation through these particular mechanisms.

Rather than pleading personal insult, hopefully, going forward we will hear some actual arguments as to why someone who is not from western Canada, nor Atlantic Canada, nor from the north should be administering all of the economic development agencies for the whole country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that my colleague just did an excellent job of giving us an accurate, fair, and very factual explanation of the bill. At no time during his speech did I detect a personal attack against the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. On the contrary, he complimented the minister's work, but he expressed concern about how much time the minister would be able to devote to the development of each region of the country. That was his point. I heard no personal attack in his excellent speech. Once again, I too recognize my colleague's excellent qualities.

As everyone knows, we will vigorously and vehemently oppose the bill before us for a number of reasons. With this enigmatic bill, the government is asking us to approve the possible future appointment of three ministers, but it is silent on the whys and wherefores. We do not know where this comes from or what is behind this bill to create three new ministerial positions.

The Liberals should be transparent and tell Canadians which of their friends they are planning to appoint. We have heard a number of suggestions since this morning. After the bill was introduced, people suggested the government might be looking to create a minister of universal taxation, a minister of partisan appointments, or maybe a minister of servile deference responsible for not offending Iran, Russia, China, the United States, and other countries so that

Canada can secure a UN Security Council seat. Nobody knows. Why do we not know? Why do members on this side of the House and Canadians even have to ask? What kind of ministers will we get? Why are we being kept guessing? Because the government lacks transparency.

The government is not saying why it wants to create these three ministerial positions. Perhaps it intends to create three positions for ministers of sunny ways so that it need not tackle the real problems in Canada's regions? We do not know, and that is my concern with the bill we are debating today. What do the Liberals have to hide? What is this government's secret agenda? Is our Prime Minister trying to use a bill to justify the potential appointment of three new ministers? Now that he has the legal basis for creating three new cabinet positions, why not go ahead and do it? Everything is possible, everything is on the table because we do not know what the government wants to do.

The one thing that struck me in particular about this bill is that it would eliminate the positions of minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada. I would like to tell my Liberal colleagues about the agency's role. It is not complicated, and all Canadians can find information about the role of the agency and its various regional agencies on its website. I suspect that my colleagues did not spend enough time reading up on the agency's role and that they actually do not know what it is.

I would like to raise a few points. Regional economic development agencies address key economic challenges by providing programs and services specific to the needs of the regions as well as the know-how to deal with crises. The agency seeks to help small and medium-sized businesses to be competitive in global markets, support growth, productivity, innovation, and especially to help them adapt to economic downturns and crises.

There is currently no regional minister, and where has that gotten us? No decisions have been made on the diafiltered milk issue because there is no one in cabinet to defend the rural regions. No one is standing up in cabinet to say that this issue needs to be resolved because jobs in Quebec are at stake.

With regard to the carbon tax, no minister stood up to defend the various regions of Quebec and especially Alberta. No one stood up for these regions, who need someone to help them with their issues from time to time. There is also the softwood lumber issue. Once again, we can see why the government needed a year to make a failed attempt at resolving the issue. The agreement expires in five days.

• (1325)

The softwood lumber agreement affects millions of jobs across Canada, but that does not seem to bother the government because no minister is in direct contact with the people in each of those regions to talk specifically about economic development.

Each minister in charge of a regional development agency had the mandate to bring a regional perspective to the development of national strategies. Absent a national strategy, however, there is no need for regional ministers. Perhaps that is a reason, but the government is still abandoning the regions of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, as well as the Atlantic, western, and northern regions. The government is abandoning everyone and, once again, we have no idea why. What is this government's secret game plan? This enigmatic bill does not tell us anything.

Having served as the mayor of Thetford Mines for seven years, I had the opportunity to deal with the federal government on a few occasions. It was easy, because I was lucky enough to be represented by an excellent minister, Christian Paradis, whose role it was to support his riding, as it is the role of each and every one of us in the House.

When we had a problem, as members of the Union des municipalités du Québec, and we wanted to discuss it with federal government representatives, we did not have to hold 22 meetings. All we had to do was meet with the minister responsible for our region, who would then pass our message along to the government.

As mayor, one is, in a sense, the minister for everything, but there are times when the mayor cannot solve everything alone. If a mayor has to put 22 meetings on his agenda to resolve one single issue because there is no longer a minister who looks after the region, well, I really think the government is on the wrong track. We need regional development agencies.

Since the government does not have a national economic strategy, it does not need regional development agencies. However, the crises in our regions are real, and regional ministers need to deal with them.

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): When the debate on this matter resumes, the hon. member will have 12 minutes and 45 seconds remaining.

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

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SAFE DISPOSAL OF LAMPS CONTAINING MERCURY ACT

The House resumed from May 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-238, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for the safe disposal of lamps containing mercury, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to the excellent initiative of my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, namely the development of a national strategy for the safe disposal of lamps containing mercury.

Private Members' Business

The bill comes at a time when many Canadians are thinking carefully about what they can do to reduce their electricity use. We are all looking for environmentally friendly alternatives to the products we use at home.

Energy-efficient light bulbs, such as the compact fluorescent lamps that I am sure many of us use at home, are a simple and important way to reduce our energy use.

A Statistics Canada report from 2014 showed that in 2011, nine out of ten households in the ten largest Canadian urban centres had at least one type of energy-efficient lamp, and 75% of them had at least one compact fluorescent lamp, or CFL.

Canadians want to do the right thing for the environment. That is why many of us buy energy-efficient lamps, but those that contain mercury may require proper handling when they have burned out. Otherwise, used bulbs can release harmful substances into the environment.

My colleague's bill refers to "lamps", so that is the term I will use today, but I want to clarify that I am referring to the various types of CFLs that contain mercury, such as fluorescent tubes and CFL bulbs, as I said. These lamps, which are common in our homes and offices, contain toxic mercury.

For those who may not know, mercury is used in a variety of consumer and commercial products because it is a very useful substance. It is a good conductor of electricity and reacts precisely to temperature and pressure changes.

In lamps, electricity vaporizes the mercury, producing UV rays that cause the phosphor coating inside the lamp to glow and emit the light you see. Unfortunately, when such products are broken or disposed of in landfill sites, toxic mercury can seep into the environment and adversely affect terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

The more fragile products, such as fluorescent lamps, may also break during transportation and release mercury into the air. The United States Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, estimated that 3% of the total mercury in discarded fluorescent lamps is released to the atmosphere during transportation to a disposal facility, while other researchers estimated emissions are as high as 17%.

If a product that contains mercury ends up in a landfill, the mercury can leach into the surrounding soil or be released into the atmosphere. If waste containing mercury is incinerated, the amount of mercury released into the atmosphere may be higher.

Without pollution controls, almost all of the mercury contained in waste entering an incinerator will be released into the air. The best way to prevent mercury releases to the environment is to send them for proper recycling, instead of throwing lamps in the garbage.

When they are sent for recycling, it is best to protect these delicate lamps by either putting them back in their original packaging or wrapping them before recycling them. That will help reduce any exposure to mercury that might happen from the lamps breaking.

Private Members' Business

Improving public awareness about the need for safe disposal and recycling of used lamps is extremely important.

●(1335)

Canadians want to know how best to deal with these products and they want to know that their government is taking steps to reduce the risks. Many municipalities have programs that accept household products that contain mercury. Some have implemented collection programs specifically for fluorescent bulbs, while others collect them as part of their household hazardous waste programs. In addition, some large retailers are taking a leadership role in recycling these lamps by offering take-back programs, which is one way to ensure that lamps containing mercury are safely and properly disposed of.

However, many Canadians still throw their used mercury-containing lamps in the garbage because they are unaware of the importance of recycling them or they do not have easy access to environmentally-sound recycling options. That is where this bill comes in. The bill calls on the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to work with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement a national strategy on the safe disposal of lamps containing mercury. The national strategy will encourage concerted action by the federal government, other jurisdictions, and stakeholders to shine a light on this important issue, increase public awareness, and lead to actions to reduce the risks of releases of mercury from these lamps.

The minister cannot implement this national strategy on her own. The provinces, territories, and municipalities all have a role to play, and the minister will need to work with them and consult with other interested parties, not just those mentioned in the bill. In addition to environmental groups and industry, which are specifically named in the bill, the minister will also need to speak to indigenous groups to understand and address their particular needs.

A careful study of the provisions of the bill will ensure that the national strategy builds on, but does not duplicate, the work already under way in some of the provinces and territories where there has been progress made in diverting these lamps from landfills. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, for example, led the development of a Canada-wide action plan on extended producer responsibility or EPR in 2009. EPR is an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of that product's life cycle. The Canada-wide action plan had several objectives. It committed member jurisdictions, namely the provinces, territories, and federal government, to work towards the development and implementation of EPR programs. It also provided guidance on how to strengthen the use of EPR.

The bill introduced by my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour will provide an opportunity for all jurisdictions and interested stakeholders to work together to develop a national strategy aimed at managing these lamps at the end of their life cycle. Proper end-of-life management will allow us to benefit from their energy efficient qualities without compromising the environment.

These are the reasons I will be supporting this bill, and I would ask the committee to do a careful review of the bill's provisions to ensure that we can work together with all interested partners and stakeholders to develop an effective national strategy.

●(1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-238, an act respecting the development of a national strategy for the safe disposal of lamps containing mercury, put forward by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

I was pleased to listen to the member for Hull—Aylmer, and I have had a chance to speak him on numerous occasions. He did bring back a few of the things that I remember when these light bulbs first started coming into discussion, and how we would have young children trying to sell these to their parents in a fundraiser so we could save the environment.

Of course, there are some unintended consequences that happen, and this is certainly one of those. We recognize what the base metal included in this can actually do. We have so many other issues with rare earth metals that are needed, for batteries, for windmills, and for solar devices. Again, there are unintended consequences, but we have to make sure we understand what all of that will do.

I am glad that the member has put forward a bill that builds on our previous Conservative government's actions to control mercury in our environment. I would also acknowledge my colleague from Abbotsford and the official opposition critic for the environment and climate change for his work on environmental issues. Bill C-238 would provide the opportunity for the House to work in a bipartisan manner, to not only pass the legislation but to kick-start the process of raising awareness and educating Canadians on the safe disposal of light bulbs containing mercury.

Most Canadians are aware of the dangers of not having a proper disposal procedure for the highly toxic substances like mercury. In 2010, our Conservative government put forth a strategy for proper mercury disposal, and, in 2013, we negotiated the Minamata Convention on Mercury, an international convention that essentially calls for tough measures to reduce mercury emissions.

Supporting Bill C-238 is in line with our previous Conservative government's approach to controlling toxic substances that pose a risk to human health. This same approach made me proud to stand with my colleagues when our previous government passed the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act, in 2010, banning the use of bisphenol A in baby bottles. I want to stress the importance of all such initiatives.

Private Members' Business

In the bill, we discuss the effects of mercury, which has the ability, as was mentioned, to be spread between water, air, and soil. Contaminations can have a catastrophic impact on our environment, and the health of all Canadians. We know that mercury is toxic and that it is related to various health problems, including birth defects, rashes, and even death. Even in lower quantities, when mercury is accumulated, it creates a significant risk to our most vulnerable.

Products containing mercury are in our landfills. We know that through this disposal method, mercury has the potential to leak into our soils and water sources. Most Canadians would agree that it is something that must be dealt with.

We, as parliamentarians, have a duty to make sure that our work also creates the right circumstances for us to protect our environment for future generations and ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for our children and grandchildren.

The bill calls for the environment minister to develop and implement a plan or proposal for the safe disposal of lamps containing mercury. I know that the people in my constituency of Red Deer—Mountain View, and all Canadians, will welcome our efforts to minimize the presence of mercury in our immediate environment and put a stop to the negative health risks that come along with it.

Bill C-238 contains three essential elements: the establishment of national standards for the safe disposal of mercury-containing lamps, the establishment of guidelines regarding facilities for safe disposal, and the creation of a plan to promote public awareness of the importance of those lamps being disposed of safely.

The bill also requires that the strategy be tabled in Parliament within two years of royal assent, and that a review and evaluation of that strategy takes place every five years afterwards. The Liberal government can implement, through regulation and policy, and by working with provincial counterparts, the three elements proposed in Bill C-238 at any time. There is a way to make things more efficient, but with a Liberal government in place, Canadians would not be surprised with delays and unnecessary costs being the result of its actions.

• (1345)

My colleague from Abbotsford has looked at a few similar pieces of legislation to this one that have already been presented in the House. Two such red-tape legislative instruments have been put forward. First, Motion No. 45 required that all infrastructure projects at the municipal level over \$500 million in value would have to go through a full climate change impact analysis to determine what the upstream and downstream greenhouse gas emission implications would be of those projects. Second, Bill C-227 would place a requirement on contractors for projects within the federal realm.

The member who has brought forward Bill C-227 suggests that projects at the municipal level originally chosen because they meet the current need of municipalities and provinces would henceforth primarily be selected through a lens of their climate change implications. This would impose additional costs on our local governments and additional red tape and delays. For example, if a building contractor wanted to bid on a federal building project, the contractor would have to go through a community benefit analysis,

adding additional costs and more red tape for projects because that would have to be built into the bid price. On top of that, it would complicate the federal bidding process by adding more red tape to the process, when in fact these projects should be bid-based on best value for taxpayer dollars or, in other words, best value for the best price.

In a way, I am somewhat skeptical about Bill C-238. Would it be another example of the Liberals over-reaching and ultimately adding additional costs to taxpayers? As much as the motives behind these initiatives are commendable, they are duplicative and would pose additional regulatory burdens on Canadians. That is my fear with this and with most any Liberal strategy.

The member could have moved forward by simply asking the government to enact the necessary regulations through robust consultation with the provinces and municipalities to provide the appropriate recycling and disposal policies across the country. For whatever reason, the member did not do that. We can deal with dangerous toxic waste like mercury now. That essential task is something the government can do now even without this bill. The Liberal government can move forward right now with regulations that set the standards and guidelines for safe disposal of these lamps. The government has the ability to make the public aware of these standards and guidelines.

Our caveat about the bill is the fear that it would lead to the Liberals actually calling for a national strategy, which would take far too long to conclude and create additional initiatives that would come with higher costs, higher taxes, and more red tape. There are many provincial jurisdictions that have programs in place, and by simply working with them we can achieve great results without adding any unnecessary hoops.

When it comes to important issues like emissions targets, research and development investments, infrastructure, and increases in health care funding, the Liberals are quite content to use evidence-based policies from the former Conservative government. While we expect them to refresh these initiatives with some Liberal red paint, unfortunately the overall Liberal program also comes with a massive amount of red ink for future generations.

In this case, making sure that mercury-containing lamps are safely disposed of is something that everyone should support. We should also do the right thing and make sure that our proposed solutions are efficient and, most importantly, effective.

I support taking this to committee in the hope that it will establish national standards for the safe disposal of mercury-containing lamps, guidelines regarding facilities for safe disposal, and create a plan to promote public awareness of the importance of such lamps being disposed of safely. I look forward to a process that will be cost efficient and does not impose an additional undue tax burden on Canadian taxpayers, nor add additional red tape that would tie up businesses, provinces, and municipalities.

Private Members' Business

● (1350)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-238, tabled by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who I sit on the environment committee with, is proposing a strategy for dealing with the mercury that comes from lamps containing mercury. He proposes three measures: national “standards”, which I will discuss later; guidelines for disposal facilities, which is required under the Basel convention and long overdue; and a plan to promote public awareness for the need for safe disposal.

By way of background, in November 2014, the previous government promulgated regulations requiring that products containing mercury be addressed. However, those regulations had exempted lamps and excluded disposal. Interestingly, in the meantime there was a Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment Canada-wide standard, which seems to have been forgotten. It also announced the intention to bring forward a code of practice, and in the spring of 2016, under the current government, the government posted for public comment a proposed code of practice for safe disposal. However, the issue has been known for far longer.

By way of background, from 2001 to about 2008, I participated in both the national MERS and Alberta processes related to the elimination of mercury in the environment. Why? The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment had issued a list of top priority substances for elimination, and mercury was at the top of the list as a neurotoxin of serious impact, particularly to children. The identified major sources were not light fixtures or any product, including auto switches, but in fact coal-fired power and cement plants. Sadly, to date, contrary to what the parliamentary secretary suggested in his speech on the bill, the federal government has absolutely failed to regulate either of those significant sources.

However, in 2005, the Alberta government, to its credit, responded to a multi-stakeholder framework issued by the Clean Air Strategic Alliance and issued regulations requiring coal-fired power plants to capture their mercury emissions. To its additional credit, this past year Alberta moved forward to shut down coal-fired plants in a faster time span due to health reasons.

Interestingly, in 2007, the federal government initiated a public consultation on alternatives to reduce mercury contamination from products containing mercury. One source was compact fluorescent bulbs. Strangely, this alternative, while more energy efficient, contained the dangerous neurotoxin, mercury. I had the privilege of participating in Environment Canada's consultation in Vancouver that year. At that meeting, I raised concern with the mercury contamination potential and that there was no life-cycle strategy. There were strong concerns being voiced across the country that the federal government was merely downloading the costs of recycling, recovering, and disposal of the mercury to the municipalities. As the Canadian Environmental Protection Act requires a cradle-to-grave response to its proposals, the department had failed in addressing this part of its mandate.

There was strong support for the need for a compliance strategy up front to evaluate the efficacy of the approach with these lights to ensure that they would limit harm to health and the environment by requiring the capture of the mercury from the bulbs when disposed. There was also a widely held view across North America that

without a regulation requiring the capture of this mercury, there would be no incentive to pursue an alternative cleaner technology.

Some provinces and some municipalities have, in the interim, established programs for the recovery of the bulbs containing mercury, where others have not. Some companies have stepped up, and some have backed down. For the most part, recovery depends on the voluntary actions of homeowners or businesses to take their bulbs to an eco-station, and by and large, the cost is then passed on to the municipalities to pay for the handling, transport, and recycling. Environment Canada has estimated that approximately 10% to 15% of these bulbs sold in Canada are recycled. The rest go to landfills. This dismal showing reflects widespread public ignorance about the issue, hence the bill the member has brought forward.

Back to Bill C-238. The first measure is a proposal for national standards. Indeed, action is needed but it is unclear exactly what mechanism is proposed by the member in the bill. Is it merely another Canada-wide standard that is not legally binding? Is it a code of practice, which is not legally binding as well?

● (1355)

Both of these measures could be made binding if they were adopted in permits or in regulations issued by provinces or territories. If it were a binding standard, the provinces or territories could enforce, and their law, if enacted, could claim equivalency. In fact, the government could issue a code of practice or a guideline if the agreement was with the provincial and territorial jurisdictions that they were going to take measures to actually make this happen.

I note that the government of the day has already issued notice that by the end of this year, it will issue and have in place a code of practice. I note that the member is proposing a measure, but only to come into effect two years from now, and it is not clear which of the three measures he would come forward with more quickly. Perhaps, given the fact that the government has shown initiative, at least one measure would be expedited.

The second proposed measure is guidelines for disposal facilities. It is not clear whether that would be a code of conduct or a guideline. Again, it would not be binding unless it was implemented by permit by a province or territory, and it would then be binding on the facility that was disposing of the mercury-containing product.

Third, the member proposes a plan for public awareness. There indeed has been a lot of support on the need for action on awareness. As I mentioned earlier, only 10% to 15% of these bulbs are being returned for proper disposal or recycling, so there needs to be awareness. However, there has also been concern that simple public awareness is not going to get it done and that we need additional measures to support, for example, the recycling facility in the member's own riding, Dan-X, which currently recycles mercury.

However, it is clear from our past experience with enterprises like this that have been set up that unless one is obligated to submit the substance for recycling, we cannot guarantee the return. Therefore, indeed, we need public awareness, but we need the first two initiatives more.

The second issue is that the code of practice the government put forward offered training for employees, but by and large, it is homeowners who take these bulbs to the recycling centres, and they are not going to be subject to the training.

In short, I am very pleased that the member has come forward. This is an important action, but I look forward to the member also supporting my initiative and move on the largest source of mercury, which is coal-fired power plants. I look forward to him taking similar action in his province of Nova Scotia.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying how pleased I am to rise to speak to Bill C-238, which my friend and colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has referred to as his bright idea.

The bill is important because it promotes a healthy environment and a strong economy at the same time. It involves the development of a natural strategy for the safe disposal of lamps containing mercury.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to thank the hon. member for his leadership on environmental issues. He has been an advocate for the environment within our caucus in Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada, his community at large, and, of course, by virtue of the bill in this House as well.

As many people already know in this House, the member was formerly a municipal councillor and deputy mayor of Halifax Regional Municipality. His legacy as an environmental leader carries on today from his time in that position. I want to thank him for his continued leadership on these issues. He has even taken the opportunity to meet with individuals who live in my riding and are trying to promote environmental products and drive the economy. They are outside of HRM, but he recognizes the benefit it will have on our region of Atlantic Canada as a whole.

From every corner of the country, whether it is my friends in Joe Batt's Arm, on Fogo Island, Tuktoyaktuk, or Vancouver Island, Canadians by and large are trying to promote a healthier environment to combat climate change. Finding more energy efficient options to household products is a great and easy place to start.

We have known for some time that energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFLs, as many people know them, are easy and long-lasting ways to cut down on the amount of energy we use in our homes every day. For this reason, many of us have used CFLs over the years. There are 75% of Canadians in large cities who have at least one of these light bulbs in their homes today.

Canadians know that protecting the environment is important for our health and safety, but also, and as a new parent, for the health and safety of our children and our grandchildren as well. This is an important motivating factor. When Canadians purchase energy-efficient lamps, they are doing something in a small way to improve the future for other generations.

Private Members' Business

They may not be aware of the proper process for disposing of these environmentally friendly products once they have them in the home, which is also very important. It is important because when it is not done correctly, these products can release toxic substances into our environment, in particular in this case, mercury, as many of the hon. members have pointed out in their remarks on the bill already.

Mercury is actually a very useful substance. It appears in many consumer and commercial products. It is a great conductor of electricity. It reacts to temperature and pressure changes, which is why it is in everyone's thermometer. However, when products containing mercury are broken or when they are disposed of in a landfill, as they often are today, the mercury can get into the environment and have an adverse impact on our ecosystems, because it is highly toxic.

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

The more fragile products, such as fluorescent lamps, may also break during transportation and release mercury into the air. The EPA, in the United States, estimates that 3% of the total mercury in discarded fluorescent lamps is released to the atmosphere during transportation to a disposal facility.

If a product that contains mercury ends up in a landfill, the mercury can leach into the surrounding soil or be released into the atmosphere. If waste containing mercury is incinerated, the amount of mercury released into the atmosphere may be even higher. Without pollution controls, almost all of the mercury contained in waste entering an incinerator will be released into the air.

The best way to prevent mercury releases to the environment is to send lamps for proper recycling, instead of throwing them away.

[*English*]

Improving public awareness about the need for safe disposal and recycling of used lamps is very important. Canadians want to know how to best deal with these products, and they want to know that their government is taking steps to reduce these risks.

As one of my colleagues from the NDP pointed out, we are not always doing it now because we do not know and we are not made to, but municipalities and industry have taken early action. Many cities have already implemented specific collection programs, and some have incorporated them into household hazardous waste programs.

In B.C., Manitoba, Quebec, and P.E.I., manufacturers and importers are subject to extended producer responsibility regulations and are required to join or implement programs to collect and recycle lamps containing mercury at the end of their life cycle. In Ontario, manufacturers and importers take part in voluntary take-back programs for these kinds of lamps.

This all being said, too many Canadians still dispose of mercury-containing lamps in the garbage simply because they do not know that they contain this harmful substance or they do not understand the importance of safely disposing of these products. In addition, many environmentally sound recycling options are not readily available at this time.

Private Members' Business

This is precisely the purpose of the bill. It calls on the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to work with different stakeholders and partners to develop and implement a national strategy on the safe disposal of these lamps. The strategy would encourage concerted action by the federal government, as well as other jurisdictions and stakeholders, to shine a light on this important issue.

Increasing public awareness can lead to actions that are going to reduce the harmful impacts of releasing mercury into the atmosphere. The minister is not able to do this without the help of others. We need the provinces, territories, municipal governments, and communities all to have a role to play if we are going to make something happen here.

In addition to environmental groups and industry, which are specifically listed in the bill, we need to collaborate on the safe disposal of mercury with our indigenous communities as well. A careful study of the provisions of the bill would ensure that the national strategy would build on and not simply duplicate work that is already being done in some of the provinces and territories, where some progress has been made in diverting this toxic substance from our landfills.

The bill would provide an opportunity for all jurisdictions and interested stakeholders to work together to develop this national strategy aimed at safely managing these lamps at the end of their lives. The proper end-of-life management of these lamps would allow us to benefit from their energy efficiency qualities without compromising the environment.

In addition, there is a serious economic impact. I know a few members have mentioned the company Dan-X in the riding of the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. This is a perfect example of how the environment and the economy can work together and promote one another at the same time.

If there is an environmental problem, such as the unsafe disposal of mercury in our landfills, there are companies that will actually create new jobs in turning what is currently treated as a waste product into a value-added product that can be injected back into the economy. This is new money that is currently literally being thrown into the garbage that would result in more jobs for Central Nova, Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, and every riding across this country if we implement a proper national strategy.

For these reasons, I am proud to be supporting the hon. member's bright idea and would ask that the committee carefully review the provisions of the bill to ensure that we can all work together with every interested party and stakeholder to make this national strategy as effective as it can be. I know the residents of my riding and my region are all going to be better off if they can enjoy a cleaner environment, greater public health, and more jobs for the region.

We are all doing what we can to protect the natural beauty of our wonderful country and we want to for generations to come. The bill would help, at least in a small way, to make a difference for the environment at home.

• (1405)

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy and, in fact, thankful to rise to speak again on

my private member's bill, Bill C-238, a national strategy for safe disposal of lamps containing mercury act.

We know that mercury is toxic, and we must keep it out of our waterways and off our lands. I would like to take a second, if I could, to thank the good people, the constituents of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, and also the stakeholders, locally and from across the country, who have reached out with their feedback and support for the bill. I will always do my best to make their voices heard here in Ottawa. I must say that I deeply appreciate the support from my colleagues, which crosses all party lines. I am thrilled that we have been able to work together on the bill.

As federal representatives, this is what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to take good ideas from home, bring them to Ottawa, and effect change. We hope to change and improve laws, and make new laws. My bright idea for Bill C-238 came when I was a municipal councillor, and I visited Dan-X Recycling in my hometown of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

From those folks, I learned about the dangers of mercury in the fluorescent bulbs, and that this facility can recycle every bit of a mercury-bearing lightbulb. This facility not only employs Canadians across its region, but it provides a valuable and very needed environmental service. This is a fantastic example of what the clean economy can accomplish.

Some provinces and municipalities across Canada have shown real environmental leadership and are leading the way in recycling these bulbs. Back home, under the leadership of Mayor Mike Savage and council, the Halifax Regional Municipality took initiative on its own and started recycling all of the spent fluorescent light bulbs in their municipal facilities. Why? Because it is the right thing to do. As a recyclable, we must ensure that fluorescent bulbs are diverted from all of our landfills across the country. Economically and environmentally, it makes good sense.

The bill calls for collaboration. It calls upon our Minister of Environment and Climate Change to open a dialogue and work with our provinces and territories to develop a robust national strategy, ensuring mercury-containing light bulbs are safely disposed of and recycled.

I believe that the successes we have seen on this issue in some provinces will help lead the discussions to a great solution that will work nationwide. It is extremely important that we have a national strategy for the safe disposal of these mercury-bearing bulbs, because a piecemeal approach hurts other parts of the country.

We heard today that toxic mercury has the ability to undergo long-range transport. Hypothetically, theoretically, mercury deposited in a Halifax landfill could redeposit into a community in northern Canada or any other remote area. This is why we cannot afford to pass the buck. It is up to us to take the initiative, to show real environmental leadership, and to protect Canadians.

I have appreciated all of the members' support so far in moving Bill C-238 forward. I urge members to please help me encourage our federal government to create an open dialogue with our provinces and territories to develop a strong national strategy for the safe disposal of mercury-bearing lamps.

Now is the time to take responsibility and protect Canadians from this needless pollution. It is only by working together that we can protect our communities and our country from this toxic mercury. It is by working together that we can leave the world a better place for future generations. Please support my bright idea, Bill C-238.

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Private Members' Business

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (The Assistant Deputy Speaker, Lib.): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 19, 2016, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

It being 2:10, the House stands adjourned until Monday, October 17, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:10 p.m.)

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