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Monday, October 17, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 17, 2016

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)
[English]

EXCISE TAX ACT

The House resumed from May 13 consideration of the motion that Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (school authorities), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support Bill C-241 to reduce the cost of GST to our local schools in Canada. The federal government already provides a 68% rebate for the GST cost to schools. However, this bill would reduce the impact of the GST for the remaining 32%. All members of the House should be able to agree that the federal government should not be making money off of the back of our education system in Canada.

Canadian families understand how tight resources are at their local schools. For instance, look at the number of fundraisers that parents have to participate in on a yearly basis. In the history of Canada, parents have never been required to pay the number of fees that they are today, whether it is for pencils, craft materials, or surcharges for athletics, music, or shop classes. Parents know that there is simply not enough money to provide the quality of education that they desire for their children.

Using 2014-15 as a benchmark, this bill would save schools across Canada a total of \$187 million, which is almost \$200 million a year that would be reinvested into Canada's future generation. This works out to tens of thousands of dollars for each and every school across our country, which is why it is so perplexing that the Liberal government would oppose this bill.

Instead of giving hope to parents that the federal government could in some small way help their schools, the Liberals have said that they are in fact opposed. However, wait a minute, would this not mean that the Liberals are opposed to helping the middle class?

I am a little more than confused by the Liberal logic here. According to the parliamentary secretary, the Liberals will not be supporting this bill because it infringes, they say, on provincial jurisdiction, and that it would increase the amount of money

available to public education in the provinces. However, what about imposing a carbon tax? If the Liberals were sincere about this new-found principle, they would not be imposing a carbon tax.

Furthermore, if the Liberals believed they should not meddle in provincial jurisdiction, we would not see the standoff between the provincial health ministers and the Minister of Health at the federal level with regard to the next health accord. Clearly, the argument that this is under provincial jurisdiction at this point is one of convenience and not one of principle.

I would submit that since this bill only affects the GST rebate, which in fact is a federal tax, this bill safely stays within the jurisdiction of the federal government. The real reason that the Liberals oppose this bill is that they broke the bank and they cannot afford this tax break to public schools, and hence this tax break to the middle class. It is hard to be a tax-and-spend government when elected on the heels of a Conservative government that cut taxes for families to the lowest rates in 50 years. I understand that.

What we have seen from the Liberals is absolutely unchecked spending. A \$10-billion-a-year promised deficit has ballooned to a \$30-billion-a-year actual deficit. A tax cut for the middle class that was supposed to be revenue neutral turned out to cost the federal government \$1 billion per year, which in turn will be passed on to the taxpayer. The economy, despite budget 2016, continues to sputter, with dismal growth performance and plunging investor confidence.

I am generally a fairly optimistic person, but the Liberals are digging Canada into debt at levels we have not seen before, and it is the next generation who will be forced to repay it. The government is mortgaging the futures of our students, which this bill is attempting to help.

The Liberal government says it would be imprudent to make piecemeal changes to the GST because of their tax review. However, we all know that this review will not be looking to decrease taxes.

• (1105)

The Liberals are so far into the red that it would appear they have no choice but to look for hidden ways to raise taxes to pay for their out-of-control spending. We have already seen this with the increased payroll taxes that the Liberals have recently brought in. The expansion of the CPP will start taxing people at a higher rate in the very near future, but Canadians will not see the benefit of this for at least 40 years.

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The Liberals cancelled the legislated tax cut to small businesses, thus breaking their campaign promise, while also promising to bring in a crippling carbon tax that will make small businesses even less competitive against the American market and result in many Canadians losing their jobs.

The government also cancelled a whole host of tax cuts for Canadian families, largely the middle class. These included cutting the children's fitness tax credit, the children's arts tax credit, the textbook tax credit, the education tax credit, and income splitting for families. That is a long list.

Who will pay for this reckless economic approach? Our students will pay for this approach. Our young people will pay. My generation will pay for this reckless spending approach.

Canada's demographic pressures are well understood. As the baby boomers retire and the size of families shrink, the ratio of Canadians who are working versus those who are not is approaching unsustainable levels. To put it simply, there are fewer people working compared to those collecting benefits than at any point in our history as a nation, and the trend is only getting worse. In 1990, there were five working Canadians per senior. In 2011, there were four working Canadians per senior. By 2030, there will be only two working Canadians for every senior. Why is this relevant? It is relevant because it means that the future government will have less ability to pay down debt because the taxes collected each year will be needed to pay rising expenses such as pensions and health care costs.

I support Bill C-241 because I believe that putting money in the pockets of our schools is more important than the wasteful spending we presently see from the Liberal government. Our schools need more funding, not a carbon tax that would increase the costs of our local schools as they are forced to pay more to run their buses, heat their schools, and purchase supplies. Our rural schools will pay the heaviest cost.

Teachers and other front-line educators tell us that students are losing the ability to learn experientially in our school programs, such as shop, band, and fine arts, because these programs are being shelved. In place of these creative programs that develop the skills that young people need to succeed in the skilled trades, these children are directed to study online, because the Internet is cheaper.

Why do we have such a shortage of skilled trades in Canada? It is because we have put our money behind convincing kids to get behind a screen instead of living life in the real world.

Who has the most to lose because of this? It is the vulnerable students among us. It is those who come largely from financially insecure homes. These students are the least likely to be able to afford the secondary fees for supplies to participate in these classes. At the end of the day, that is a national tragedy, because often it is these students who have the most to benefit from acquiring a skilled trade.

It is clear that schools in Canada could use this money that would be granted to them through a GST rebate.

Our students are our future. When parents give their children a hug before they get on the school bus or they get dropped off at

school in the morning, those parents want to know that the government is doing everything in its power to benefit the future of their children. This legislation would help provide that support. This legislation is about our future generation. This legislation is about supporting Canada.

I ask all members of Parliament on this side of the House and across the aisle, especially those with kids, to think about their children and to consider the future of this great country. I ask them to support this piece of legislation.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to participate in the debate on Bill C-241, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act (school authorities).

The bill would increase the goods and services tax rebate rate for school authorities from 68% to 100%.

We oppose this bill for a number of reasons, the main one being that it would result in federal interference in an area under provincial jurisdiction.

If we use this tool to give money to schools, that could be perceived as money given directly to provincial institutions. Why those institutions and not others? How would we decide to whom this change would apply and to whom it would not? I am not saying it must never be done, but it is important to have an organized approach to making these choices rather than doing it randomly.

Furthermore, this bill would be costly: an estimated \$190 million in 2016 rising to \$220 million by 2021. When the GST was introduced, measures were put in place to ensure equal treatment across the public sector, and that includes school boards. Making arbitrary, unfounded changes to the GST could have unexpected consequences for other levels of government with responsibilities related to primary and secondary school funding.

I would add that the bill is not in line with our government's primary objective, which is to grow the middle class and the economy. Our government has a much more all-encompassing program to stimulate the economy and improve the lives of middle-class Canadian families.

I would like to share some examples of measures in budget 2016 that are already proving their worth.

The government introduced the Canada child benefit, which, I would remind the House, is the most significant social policy innovation in a generation. This benefit is providing families with up to \$6,400 per year for each child under the age of six, and up to \$5,400 for each child aged six to seventeen. Middle-class Canadian families can use that money to invest in their children's education and well-being. The fact is that nine out of ten families will receive more in child benefits, including 4,000 families in my riding. I would also like to point out that the Canada child benefit is not taxable, which is quite significant.

Another very important measure introduced by our government is the middle-class tax cut, which has helped nearly nine million Canadians.

Our tax cut and Canada child benefit truly are measures that will help the middle class and those working hard to join it by enabling them to save money, invest more, and stimulate the economy right now.

We believe that a strong economy starts with a strong middle class that has access to high-quality jobs. The government introduced additional measures to support that in budget 2016, with a focus on young Canadians and the middle class, who all want to secure sustainable employment, and rightly so.

Everyone agrees that young Canadians need to be adequately prepared to enter the job market today and in the future, and for that they need to have access to education and training.

That is why the government changed the Canada student grants program by increasing the amounts for students from low- to middle-income families. This increase also applies to part-time students. We also expanded the program in order to make more students eligible for it.

We can see the results, as more than 350,000 students will receive more money for their education. In addition to scholarships, many students are eligible for Canada student loans, but sometimes they worry about not being able to pay them back. We are injecting \$131.4 million over five years into the repayment assistance plan so that students are not required to start repaying their loans until they are earning at least \$25,000 a year.

These measures reduce the financial burden on young graduates and offer the future members of the middle class the peace of mind they need to take some time to find a good job.

To help young Canadians find rewarding work early in their career, we are helping them acquire work experience. How are we doing that? The government is creating up to 35,000 additional jobs over each of the next three years through the Canada summer jobs program. This investment will ensure that at least twice as many job opportunities are supported under the program.

Budget 2016 is about the middle class and those working hard to join it. As I said earlier, it includes measures for young people, as we just saw, but also for pensioners, as I will demonstrate shortly.

• (1115)

The government worked with the provinces to strengthen the Canada pension plan, the CPP, so that young people can retire with dignity when the time comes. This collaboration with the provinces resulted in an agreement for a more generous pension plan for Canadians.

CPP benefits will increase from one-quarter to one-third of eligible earnings. The maximum income covered by the CPP will also increase by 14%. This new system will be phased in over seven years, starting on January 1, 2019, so that the short-term impact is minimal and gradual.

In closing, I would say that the government has a comprehensive policy for middle-class Canadian families. The government is supporting the middle class with tax cuts and the Canada child benefit; it has taken many steps to help Canadians access suitable

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training and find good jobs; and it is ensuring that Canadians will have more money when they retire.

These are just a few of the social policies that the government is implementing to grow the economy and the middle class. The intention behind Bill C-241 is good. However, the bill does not align with the policy of growing the middle class that is the basis for our efforts to build a Canada that can face all the challenges of this century.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Bill C-241, sponsored by my colleague from Saskatoon—Grasswood. The bill would amend the Excise Tax Act to allow for a 100% rebate of the GST for school authorities. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Alex Atamanenko, the former MP for British Columbia Southern Interior, for his work on the bill's precursor, Bill C-259, in the 41st Parliament. I am very pleased to see the bill come back in this Parliament and am also proud to support a fellow member from the Saskatoon area.

The bill is about fairness. School authorities operate under provincial jurisdiction and are funded by provincial governments. Why should one level of government be taxing another level of government? At present, school authorities receive a 68% GST rebate, which means that they pay 32% of the GST on everything they buy. In Saskatchewan alone, that works out to be approximately \$8 million that could be spent in classrooms.

Although education is a provincial responsibility, the federal government should not interfere with a province's ability to invest as much as possible in education. An extra \$8 million would go a long way to improving and enhancing education services for kids in my province.

Health care is another provincial responsibility, but it receives a 100% GST rebate. Given the increasing pressures on school authorities, the time has come to afford them the same treatment.

It is perfectly logical that school authorities should not use taxpayer money to pay tax on products and services, since they are funded by the provinces. We in the NDP also believe that the federal government must maintain sufficient transfers to the provinces to better fund educational institutions.

The cost of providing educational opportunities for children in Canada is an expensive undertaking, and the level of investment in education is the subject of much debate.

Studies have looked at the level of investment required for education. One of the tools used is called the dependency ratio. It is the percentage generated by dividing the population of children under age 17 by the population of adults aged 18 to 64. In the last census, Saskatchewan had one of the highest dependency ratios, at 49.2%, and was well above the national average. Quebec had one of the lowest dependency ratios. Saskatchewan had the distinction of having one of the highest dependency ratios since 1989.

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Research conducted by Saskatchewan school boards indicates that the province has more onerous needs, for both youth and older residents, than other provinces. I quote:

As a result of the age distribution of the population, Saskatchewan is facing needs beyond those of other provinces.... These needs will not disappear. This province has a larger proportion of young people of school age and a larger proportion of individuals over 65. In other words there are fewer people of working age to support those who are not working. There are fewer people to pay the taxes required for support of services such as education and health.

According to the same research, the realities that exist in my home province are the following: Saskatchewan has more young children per working-age person than any other province; Saskatchewan has more senior citizens per working-age person than any other province; the federal government is downloading spending on public programs and services, and this has an indirect effect on education; and Saskatchewan is spending a smaller proportion of total expenditures on education than previously while spending a larger proportion than ever before on servicing the debt.

Decreases in education funding have effects on programs for children. That is obvious. In Saskatchewan today, there are classrooms with 35 or more students.

Sadly, the provincial Sask Party government has only made things worse. More than 350 full-time educational assistant jobs were eliminated by this government. Students are not getting the one-on-one attention they need, and as I mentioned, too many classrooms have 35 kids or more. Some schools are crumbling and desperately need repairs, and classes have been forced into hallways, art supply closets, and even boot rooms. Despite years of windfall revenues, new schools that were desperately needed were not built. Now this government's only plan is to plow ahead with a privatized, rent-a-school P3 scheme that costs more and takes longer and hands control of our public assets over to corporations. For example, in Saskatchewan, an American corporation will be responsible for the maintenance of 18 schools.

• (1120)

In its 2014 budget, the Sask Party government in Saskatchewan cut the education capital budget by nearly 20%, taking \$23.4 million away from school building and repair needs, despite the desperate need for more classrooms and smaller class sizes to relieve overcrowding.

When the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education delivered its \$2.2-billion budget this year, 13 of the province's 28 school divisions were allocated less money than in the previous year. The ministry blamed teachers' salaries and left these individual school boards to make up the shortfall.

Charles Smith, an assistant professor with the Department of Political Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, said the government had effectively shifted its financial obligations onto school divisions. He said, "They're basically asking that institutions do the cuts that they don't want to do themselves. The school boards are left holding the shortfall that they had no hand in negotiating".

It is very clear that school authorities in Saskatchewan, and I am sure elsewhere, are facing huge challenges. An injection of funds via a 100% GST rebate would provide a much-needed boost for school authorities and the communities they serve. The extra money could

be used to build and maintain schools, hire more teachers and educational assistants, address inequities in education for indigenous children, and give all kids the one-on-one attention they need and deserve.

How can we be sure that these extra revenues will be used for education? This year the Saskatchewan government retained the GST refund for the health regions, which was normally used as part of their operating revenues. This added insult to injury and put an even more onerous burden on local health authorities.

I began by saying that this bill is about fairness, and I would like to close by reminding my colleagues about the issue of tax fairness. Over the last decade, governments have increasingly shifted the tax burden away from corporations and onto individuals. Canada now has one of the lowest corporate tax rates in the G7.

In 2014, for example, for the first time in Canada's history, more than half the federal government's revenue was shouldered by personal income taxes. If Canada's corporate tax rate was the same today as it was in 2000, we would be collecting an extra \$20 billion a year in revenue, enough to fund a national child care program, free university tuition, or a children's dental care program. Instead, it has been cut in half since 2000.

What do corporations do with this money? Sadly, this money is not being reinvested in the way we hoped, in the economy, so not only have we lost out on revenue that could be used to provide services but there is also very little economic benefit derived from these corporate tax breaks. Statistics Canada data shows that Canada's corporate cash hoard is more than \$626 billion. That is more than the federal debt and almost a third of Canada's GDP.

If the logic for these corporate tax cuts was to get the economy moving and working, it just is not working. It really is regular everyday Canadian taxpayers who are paying the price. The rest of us have had to make up the shortfall by paying more than our fair share. At the same time, local, municipal, health, and school authorities are being squeezed when governments download costs to an even lower level of government.

In the end, there is only one taxpayer, as our Conservative friends like to say, and in this instance, I would agree with them. We have to stop letting corporations off the hook. We have to stop offloading their fair share of taxes onto individual citizens, who not only pay more in taxes but also have to pay again in another way, by having fewer and fewer services delivered at the local level.

I have seen first hand the realities facing the local school authorities in my riding, and I believe that Bill C-241 would improve their budget situations. However, I would ask my hon. colleague if this bill would in any way mandate that the extra monies be put back into local school authorities or if provincial governments could simply withhold this money and use it any way they wanted.

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● (1125)

I am also cognizant that the bill, if passed, would have cost implications for the federal government. According to the Library of Parliament's estimates, the real cost to the federal government of refunding the GST to school authorities was about \$339 million in 2016, and then the changes put forward in Bill C-241 could represent additional costs in excess of \$160 million annually.

The NDP would like to refer the bill to a House of Commons standing committee so that a thorough analysis could be conducted into the reality that school authorities are facing and the various measures the federal government could take to help them deliver a quality education to children everywhere.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood, for his first private member's bill. It is an excellent bill. It is very fortunate to be picked early in the list of precedence for these bills. He has taken the opportunity to show us how the GST treatment is so unfair and illogical in many ways. What he has suggested is that we move from 68% to 100% on the GST rebate. In the province of British Columbia, which I represent, that would mean an additional \$17 million that schools could put toward supplies.

Right now, the Liberals are against the bill. They recognize that there is an issue because they are bringing forward the school teachers' tax credit. On the one hand, they say there is no problem, but on the other hand, they feel they have to bring forward a tax credit for school teachers. It would make a whole lot more sense to me that if they want to support teachers and the school system, instead of bringing in a "boutique" tax credit—as they like to call them—for teachers, they should do something that would be eminently more logical and sensible and allow the schools to have additional resources. That could provide support for what has been identified as a problem.

I find it strange for them to argue against the bill. I find it foolhardy that they are going to vote against it. They should at least be taking the opportunity to send this piece of legislation to committee so that members could really look at it and we could hear how important it would be to the school boards across the country.

One of the first things I will talk about is whether it is interfering with provincial jurisdiction. Currently, the rebate is 68%, so if the government is giving a 68% rebate, moving it to 79%, 83%, or 100% would be part of the business of the federal government, namely, to determine what an appropriate rebate of the GST should be for our different organizations and sectors. To be frank, we have heard this from a number of different people who have stood up and said there is just one taxpayer. It just does not make a lot of sense for the federal government to collect tax that the provincial governments or municipalities are then just going to have to tax back to the same person.

I was responsible for a small rural community health care centre when the original GST came in. It really did have a profound effect on the budget and the budgetary process that I was involved with. We should not think that the GST and the GST rebate are insignificant. Certainly, the piece that many of us have not even talked about is the paperwork associated with applying for the

rebate. They pay the GST, then I do not know how many people we have working in the Canada Revenue Agency crunching the numbers and then cutting the cheques. We have a pretty expensive system that has been established to deal with the GST and the GST rebates.

Mostly, what we have is a system that does not make a lot of sense. In 2004, it was a Liberal federal government that said it would go from 57% to 100% for municipalities. I would really like it if one of the Liberals would stand up and talk about the logic. Municipalities are at 100%. We have our health care organizations, which I believe are at 83%. We have our school system at 68%, and I believe there is a 1% difference between what our universities and colleges get.

● (1130)

Not only should we be supporting this private member's bill, but if it went to committee it would be an opportunity to hear more broadly from witnesses. The government might actually be able to use the information it gets at committee to rethink this whole policy around the rebate.

What we have here is an eminently logical, sensible private member's bill. We have one Canadian taxpayer and a government that, from all the debate I am hearing today, will be voting against it for no coherent reason. It's important to note that there is no coherence in its argument against at least sending this to second reading.

Our schools are under pressure. Obviously the Liberals do recognize that, because of their decision around the tax credit they are going to be giving to school teachers. What better way to support our school system. This is not about interfering in provincial jurisdiction. It is just about doing what they have done for municipalities. If I were going to do a private member's bill, I would suggest that the government do the same for our hospitals and our health care facilities.

I will make one final plea to my Liberal colleagues on the other side and say that when we have an opportunity to vote, I think their constituents would be very proud if they stood and supported this particular measure. Let us see what we can do to support our school system and look at creating some coherence around the GST rebate.

Again, I thank my colleague. We look forward to the vote. I will remain optimistic about seeing this move at least to the next step.

● (1135)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak on this particular piece of legislation.

I have been listening to previous speakers from the opposition. I am bit surprised by their general attitude, with them, in some cases, promoting misinformation—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary may not realize that he has already had an opportunity to weigh in on this particular question before the House. The Standing Orders allow members to speak at least once on a bill at this particular stage of the debate. So we will not be able to carry on with his intervention here, unless the member is seeking unanimous consent. I am not seeing consent.

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Resuming debate. The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill, which I have not had a chance to do yet, and again to congratulate my friend from Saskatoon—Grasswood for bringing forward this great piece of legislation.

In the House, we are always looking for ways that we can help education and our schools, which I hope we all believe is important. But sometimes we do not look for the ways we can help through simplification. This is what I particularly like about my friend's bill. He is not trying to add an additional tax credit here, but would in fact leverage the existing system. He is saying something sensible, that it does not make much sense for governments to try to collect substantial tax revenue from other levels of government.

What the bill before us today would do is to provide for an increased GST rebate back to school authorities. Right now it is at 68%. This bill would move it to 100%, given that schools are paying 100% GST. This would be useful for schools in my constituency and those across the country, because it would save their having to give money to the federal government that they would otherwise have to give. The bill would be a simplification, but it would also make a practical difference, no doubt about it. It would give money back to schools they could use to invest in vital things that are important to them, whether school supplies, infrastructure, additional services for students, or simply reducing the fees that parents have to pay, or freeing up resources that could be used, or other kinds of things at the school board level. There is a lot of value in that money going back to schools.

Deeper than that, though, we can ask what is the sense of the existing system in which we have different levels of government charging tax on each other. I will just say as well that we have a government that rather than reducing taxes on other levels of government actually wants to increase the taxes on other levels of government. We have the imposition of a carbon tax, with the federal government trying to require the provinces to impose that tax. In the case of many jurisdictions, that tax would affect other levels of government. It would affect school boards. The purpose of carbon taxation on other levels of government is supposedly to create an incentive for less use of carbon, but I have to say that in Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, the school buses are going to keep running regardless of the taxes levied. There is no logical way this would change behaviour. We cannot have children walking to school from acreages or, generally speaking, in a geographically larger community. There is just a disconnect in terms of practicality.

However, we are levying taxes on other levels of government that school boards are then paying to the federal government, at the same time as the federal government is transferring resources to the provinces and the provinces are transferring resources to school boards. Every time we have this back-and-forth transfer of resources, it imposes an administrative cost and burden. So we in the House should always look first for ways to get resources to that local level where the services are actually delivered.

In practice, it is our local communities and our school boards that are most likely to be interfacing with people in terms of the practical

services they use on a day-to-day basis. We should be looking for ways of getting resources there. These are levels of government, by the way, that have far fewer taxing powers than the federal government or the provincial governments have. We can collect taxes in all sorts of different ways. Although our local governments are the level of government that people are most likely to interact with, these governments have much less ability to raise or control their own budgets. Yet we have this process by which the federal government, with the current GST rebate system, is taking money from those levels of government.

● (1140)

There are two things. It is about giving more authority, resources and ability to those local levels of government, in this case school boards. The same principle perhaps would apply to municipalities. However, it is also about simplification. It is about stepping back and looking at why we have this back-and-forth of money and looking at whether we can find ways of simplifying the transfer system.

Again, I want to congratulate my friend, the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood. This an excellent bill. It speaks to something we should be trying to do at a broader level, which is provide more support to our local communities, our school boards, and our municipalities, given how important they are, practically, in the lives of people in our constituencies. It is also about trying to do that in a more efficient way.

I am very pleased to support the bill. I am really surprised that we do not see support from government members. I would encourage them to talk to schools and parents within their communities, and be willing to step out from the line that perhaps is being directed. All of us have individual responsibilities to our constituents. We all have a responsibility to vote based upon what we think the people within our communities would like to see and what is in their best interest. That is our primary responsibility, not to some recommendation we might get.

These are private members' bills. Despite the direction we may see some in the government wanting the party to go, I hope government members will take a look at what is in the bill, at the value that it would have to people in their community, and that they be willing to step out beyond that line and say that it is good legislation, that they will support it even if that maybe not what those around them do.

Quite obviously this is a good bill. It is the kind of bill that all of those watching, whether they are parents, students, or people involved in local governments, would say that it makes sense, but that it does not make sense for the federal government to take money from school boards that they could use and go through this administrative process of back-and-forth.

The bill would significantly improve upon the current system. I am proud to support it on behalf of my constituents in Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. I hope we will see other members line up behind it as well.

● (1145)

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this journey to get a 100% rebate back to school boards in Canada has been a passion of mine for nearly 10 years. I was a school member in Saskatchewan for nine and a half years.

School divisions in our country pay the GST. They are rebated 68%. That means they end up paying 32%. This is clearly a tax on a tax, federal to provincial and territorial authorities. It means \$187 million that could be used in the classrooms is being taken away today.

I spent the good part of this summer going coast to coast. I talked with parents, educators, government officials, and most of all I talked with trustees. They all agreed that this bill should go to reading. I attended the Canadian School Boards Association's annual meeting in Winnipeg in July. Trustees from across the country lined up to support the bill. The rebate of \$187 million to school authorities ends up to be less than 1% of the entire federal budget.

The Canadian School Boards Association's outgoing president Janet Ford said that it was illogical that school boards, as publicly funded taxpayer-funded institutions should be paying the goods and services tax.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation, which represents over 200,000 teachers, agrees that public services administered by school authorities that are publicly funded should not be taxed. That was signed by its president Heather Smith.

Don Morgan, who is the education minister in Saskatchewan, said that the introduction of the bill was timely as the reciprocal taxation agreement signed between the federal government and the province of Saskatchewan recently expired in December. This reciprocal fund included all government ministries, but did not include the public service organizations such as school divisions. This would be an opportune time to revisit this agreement. Don is pleased to provide his support for Bill C-241 as the education minister in the province of Saskatchewan.

Across our great land we have had dozens of letters supporting my private member's bill, from the Western Québec School Board, a great letter from the Ottawa-Carleton school district, the Toronto public schools, and the Seine River School Division in Manitoba, which would save \$130,000 annually to be added back into its classrooms in Manitoba.

I will quote the board chair of the Calgary Board of Education, Joy Bowen-Eyre, who stated that \$3.6 million would be returned to its division. That is equivalent to the entire operating costs of a large elementary school of 600 students.

From my city of Saskatoon, public school chair Ray Morrison said that an additional nine full-time teachers would be added with the \$723,000 that would be returned through this rebate.

The Greater Saskatoon Catholic Board of Education and its chair Diane Boyko said that nine full-time teachers or 21 more educational assistants would be hired immediately if the division would receive the full GST rebate.

There is not one school board in my province that would not receive the benefit of my private member's bill.

On October 5 in the House, the Liberal MP for London North Centre stood up and said that it was an honour to rise and mark World Teachers' Day. The member commended the more than 40 members of the current Liberal caucus who were teachers. The

Business of Supply

member from London North Centre said, "We are a team committed to education and educators."

I ask each and every member across the aisle, including the member for Papineau, who once was a teacher, to support my private member's bill. It was the Liberal government in 2004 that gave municipalities a 100% rebate in the GST. It went from 57% all the way to 100%. I ask the government to support Bill C-241, do the right thing, and refund the GST to school authorities like it did to municipalities across the country 12 years ago.

• (1150)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 19, immediately before the time provided for private member's business.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: It being 11:51 a.m., the House will stand suspended until the time for government orders.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:51 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SOFTWOOD LUMBER AGREEMENT

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC) moved:

That, recognizing that the Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade promised 400,000 Canadian forestry workers a framework agreement on softwood lumber exports with the Obama Administration by mid-June, 2016, recognizing the government's failure to meet that deadline and their subsequent failure to negotiate a final agreement before the expiry of the last trade agreement on October 12, 2016, and given that many high-quality, well-paying jobs in the forestry sector are now at risk due to the government's lack of action, the House call upon the government to stop delaying and take all necessary steps to prevent a trade war that will threaten the livelihood of Canadian workers and communities.

Business of Supply

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to stand today and move this motion forward. I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. Of course, this is very near and dear to her heart and her riding.

There are over 650 communities that rely on mills to maintain their viability, and around 400,000 people work in those mills and the ancillary jobs that are supported by them. It is very important that we get this right.

There have been four separate trade wars since 1982, and that was mentioned in the reading of the motion. The longest period of calm we have had throughout this was the last decade of the former Conservative government, which I was happy to be a minister of. My good friends, the ministers of trade during that time, were able to negotiate 10 years of truce, 10 years of relative stability and predictability in the softwood lumber sector. Because of that, we saw our softwood lumber sector grow. We also saw the American sector maintain a stronger portion of their own domestic supply because of the stability of that sector, even though there was more Canadian product going in.

It is a complex agreement, to say the least, and I do not want to undersell it. It is made worse now by the obfuscation of the Liberal government of the day, in that it did not recognize this as an issue as far back as the mandate letter to the minister, the throne speech, its budgets, and so on, or how important this industry is. It is a multi-billion dollar industry across Canada that feeds into the GDP of this great country. It is part of the diversity that we have.

As I said, 650 communities are on edge now because of this impending fifth trade war. The problem is that once these start, they run on five-year cycles. The Americans will use these five years for litigation and all sorts of actions that will stop the flow of our product going south. There are four or five major industry groups that are both American and Canadian in content. They are very much integrated. Those are not the ones we are concerned about. They are very important, but it is the small and medium-sized enterprises that are going to get squeezed out if we do not get this deal right.

As I understand it, from the hearings we had at the trade committee, which I am happy to sit on, and from leaks that have happened through the American side, we are not getting anything out of the Canadian side. The provinces are kept in the dark as to where the federal government is at. Industry in Canada writ large is in the dark as to where the Government of Canada is at. The problem is that no one really knows what is being said or what is being done.

We are all led to believe that there is a brand new way of doing things with the Americans. Everybody was all aglow about the family reunion that the Prime Minister held in Washington. We were all on edge when the American president came and spoke to us here in the House. However, at no junction was softwood lumber ever made an issue of, even though it was coming to a conclusion last week.

We are now in that position where we are not negotiating from a level of strength. We are negotiating while trying to play catch-up with the Americans who hold all the cards at this point. Having said that, there are things that the minister and the Prime Minister could and should be doing. One of them, of course, is getting hold of the

Liberals' buddy in Washington, the president, who is still the president in what is called a lame duck session. If he wants to make this a legacy, he certainly could but it is going to take a heavy push from this side of the border to make that happen. It is certainly a lot more important for us than it is for the Americans at this point.

The other thing is that the Liberals dropped the ball over this past year and did not really pick it up until probably July when people started putting pressure on them and asking what was happening. We asked questions back in late winter and early spring about where we were with this. The Liberals had the time to be on the ground. For the first 100 days, there were all these wonderful promises made as to what was going to happen. None of that has come to fruition, on any level, on any issue.

At the end of the day, the least the minister could be doing right now is securing the agreement that there will be no litigation from the American lumber side while we are negotiating. That is the very least she could be doing. I am hoping she is on the phone later today. Now that we have given her that idea, she should at least be securing that so that we do not, again, deal with this from a state of less strength than the Americans.

As I have said, this has been a problem for decades and will continue to be simply because of differences in the way we do things. What the Americans are calling us out on, and it is always this one issue, in layman's terms, is stumpage. This is what the province of record charges for the timber that is withdrawn, and it varies from province to province.

The Province of Quebec has made some significant changes in the way it does that in coming to grips with what the Americans are going to want to demand. There are also 30 mills right along the border in Quebec that use material from Maine, which comes up into those mills, is manufactured into softwood lumber framing materials, and goes back into the U.S. Therefore, Quebec has always had an exemption. There are two of those in Ontario, as well.

●(1205)

We have also had an exemption for Atlantic Canada because most of that is privately held lands and it does not really fit within the description of the trade war fight, but again, the government has not shown an ability to get that exemption for Atlantic Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador.

There are a lot of irons in the fire, none of them warm at this point, other than the end we are trying to hang onto, which the Americans are handing us. At the end of the day, there is a lot of work to be done. I just do not see that happening. I know the work that we went through on country of origin labelling to get our beef and pork equal access into the U.S. It took a WTO challenge. We have been there before on softwood lumber as well and I will give the government of the day credit for that work, but when negotiating at the WTO, or NAFTA, or in the American courts, or however we decide to move forward, our industry is taking a hit. In those 650 mill towns, 400,000 workers are not going to have a happy Christmas and an early 2017.

Business of Supply

It is up to the government to get to Washington. I know a lot of work was done with Ambassador Froman over the TPP. He is a tough negotiator, but the Americans need our product. They cannot supply their own domestic market, so they need Canadian product to do that. We have heard through some of our American connections and consumer groups working with us on country of origin labelling that the first foray of the Liberal government was to move from the 34% access we have now, which we have never used; we hit a peak of 28% to 30%. The first foray was to start at 26%, so they are taking 33% right off the table to begin with. That is a terrible negotiating ploy and if this is what it takes to say we are cozying up to the American president, then that is too high a cost. We have to realize that we need to negotiate a lot tougher than that, not just bend over and let the Americans run rampant on us on softwood lumber.

It is going to take some pretty severe work to get this turned around. The biggest thing that the minister is going to have to do right away is to make sure to take the litigation right off the table. That gives the Americans a hammer, not just a lever but a hammer. If there is no litigation in the works, then we can sit down and negotiate properly and get this done, much the same as other issues have been resolved.

Despite \$30 billion of supposed stimulus spending the government has done in the first year, none of it has really driven any jobs. We have not seen any jobs increase across Canada at all, let alone that we are starting to see jobs lost in the oil patch, in the industry sector, and because we are not consummating the pending trade deals such as the TPP. We need to get serious about how we handle all of that work.

The opposition has put together a softwood lumber task force. We made the announcement this morning to look at how we move forward working with those contacts that we developed as we came to grips with country of origin labelling and had it finalized, and working with consumer groups, the construction association, the homebuilders association, the retailers, all of those people in the U.S. who want Canadian lumber. They want Canadian content because in the long term, it keeps their own industry honest. We also need to diversify our portfolio when it comes to softwood. That means taking up the advantages that we have in Japan, Korea, and China where they are starting to buy a lot of our product and make sure that we have that to use as a bit of a push-back on the Americans.

For a number of different industries we have too many eggs in that basket. We rely on the Americans for far more than we should and that is the whole nature of having diversity within our trade portfolio so that we make sure we have access to those other markets to keep the Americans honest.

We are asking the Liberal government to get serious about this file, become transparent, become accountable to the provincial ministers, to the small and medium-sized businesses. When we held the hearings that my colleagues and I have had with our provincial counterparts, they are not getting a lot of information, if any at all, to know what is being done and what they should be prepared for.

There is a tremendous amount of work to be done. I know the minister has travelled extensively. The parliamentary secretary has discussed this with a number of industries across the country as well, but the message is not getting through. The industries say they are

being led down a dark alley they really do not want to go down, and that somehow we are dealing from a position of less than strength. We are asking for the government to take heed of the motion we are putting forward, help us pass this, and get serious about the softwood lumber file.

● (1210)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rejoice in the fact that the party opposite seems to have discovered consultations as a method of moving forward. This is reassuring to the people on our side.

There were a number of different strategies raised in the hon. member's speech. Do we capitulate and just give the Americans what they want in order to get an agreement? Do we hold out and not have an agreement? I am not sure what the member would like us to do. There was a moment of startling honesty in his speech where he said there were trade tribunal rulings last time around that gave us leverage in negotiating with the Americans. Where does he want us to go? I am not clear.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, the underlying point today is that we want the Liberals to take this seriously. There are 650 communities across Canada and 400,000 workers, who are all concerned, and the anxiety level goes up the more that they see these deadlines pass. These deadlines were well known. We knew it was going to be October 12 for the end of that grace period. My good friend and colleague, the member for Abbotsford, was able to negotiate a two-year extension. As I said, we have had 10 years of relative calm in this.

He is right. There were WTO challenges. There have been NAFTA challenges. We have won the majority of those. It is a matter of again using that hammer on the Americans to make sure they know how serious we are on this issue. If we had not done a WTO challenge and just let the Americans keep pushing us around on the country-of-origin labelling, we would never have had a resolution.

I am asking the Liberals to take that under consideration and to start working with a lot of the groups in the U.S. who are on our side. We found that with the country-of-origin labelling. They took their own government to court because it was going to hurt their own enterprises. There are a tremendous number of allies out there, and the government is just not taking advantage of them.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, for his work on this file, and for his work on the committee with me as well. We both have heard from many people at the committee who have a deep worry about what is going happen now.

The member mentioned 400,000 jobs. Unfortunately, we are already down to 260,000 jobs in this country. We have forestry workers who are deeply uncertain about whether they will have a job going forward because of the lack of action on this file. It is imperative that we get an agreement to address this insecurity.

However, my question for the member is, does he think that the government should develop a plan B to support the industry, such as the loan guarantees that they are calling for?

Business of Supply

•(1215)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the government should take any agreement that is offered. Certainly the Americans are tough negotiators, and we have seen that on a number of different fronts. At the end of the day, they have to have an agreement of some sort in order to have predictability and stability and get those 400,000 people back on the job, and the 650 communities across Canada that rely on the income from those very well-paying jobs. That is what we need.

It is imperative that we get an agreement, but not just any agreement. It is imperative that we do it in the best interests of Canada. We hear through the back channels in the U.S. that the first offer from the Canadian side was to tuck tail and run. It was to go to 26% rather than the 34% that we had, which we never really made use of, but it was there. It is concerning, and the concern has reverberated through the industry and through the provincial ministers. They are concerned that they are going to face a lot of backlash, a lot of push-back, from these communities that will be without all of these high-paying jobs.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we see a concerning trend in the government's relationship with the United States. It is prioritizing the glitz, the photo ops, rather than advancing Canada's interests. We saw this when the Prime Minister went to Washington. He chose to bring members of his family when he should have been bringing key government ministers responsible for important files that are in our interests.

I wonder if the member would talk specifically about the importance in our relationship with the Americans of making sure that our focus is on advancing Canada's national interest.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, that is the underlying factor. It is absolutely true. We have been led down the path, that there is somehow a new way of doing business with the Americans, that everything is sweetness and light. Yet, that is not how the Americans operate. Anyone buying into that, saying that the Americans are going to give us everything we need because there is this new bromance between the Prime Minister and the President, is naive and short-sighted, to say the least.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to today to speak to this important issue. My colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster articulated a broad picture of the issue, its importance, and that we need to come to some resolution. It has been a challenge over the last 30 years, but the Conservative government got the job done.

I was first elected in 2008, but from 2006 to 2008, I remember the relief that the ridings and communities across our country felt because they knew the agreement was in place. No agreement is perfect, but it brought peace in the woods for over 10 years. It was something that the Conservative government was able to get done. After 30 years of very challenging circumstances, it got the job done.

Many people in the House represent urban areas and are perhaps not as familiar with the forestry industry as some of us who live in rural communities, so I want to talk a bit about the forestry industry and how important it is. Someone who lives in Toronto and represents a downtown riding may hear about the softwood lumber

agreement and be a little puzzled as to why this agreement even matters.

The Forest Products Association of Canada has a map that shows communities across the country. I urge people to go to that website and look at the amazing map. There are little green dots that represent communities whose viability completely depend on the forestry industry. If they look at British Columbia, parts of Quebec, and Ontario, they will see provinces that are full of those green dots, rural communities that are completely dependent on the forestry industry.

In British Columbia right now, 34% of its exports are forest products. B.C. represents 72% of Canada's softwood lumber industry, so clearly the softwood lumber agreement is absolutely critical to the province. The Conservative government recognized that it should not be so dependent on the American market, and British Columbia has done a great job with the Asia-Pacific gateway and how it moves products. Asia has now replaced Europe as its second most important partner in terms of getting its products to market. Having said that, the U.S. market remains absolutely critical. British Columbia has 58,000 people in the industry and \$6.5 billion in GDP.

Right now in Canada, the fiscal situation is very concerning. When we look at Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, British Columbia has been a glimmer of positive movement forward. I am very concerned that if an agreement is not reached, the province will have very significant challenges.

I will narrow this down a little more. I talked a bit about the big picture in British Columbia. In the riding I represent, there is a beautiful little community, Clearwater, which is on the Yellowhead Highway. People may have driven through it when travelling from Kamloops through to Jasper. It is a very popular place for tourists, including those from Europe, who visit beautiful Wells Grey Provincial Park.

In that community of about 2,200 people, there is the Canfor Vavenby mill, which is predominantly spruce and pine. This particular mill has 150 direct workers. Tourism is important to this little community of 2,200 people, but the most important industry in that community is the mill, with 150 workers. It has a payroll of \$20 million and is estimated to add \$100 million to the local economy. We can imagine what would happen if it were no longer viable. This community is just one example of the many green dots on that map by The Forest Products Association of Canada.

•(1220)

Not only does the mill provide well-paying jobs in the community, but it does a great job in terms of the apprenticeship training program. It also sends chips to Kamloops. Another thing it does as a community benefit is for heating. It provides chips free of charge to the Dutch Lake Community Centre to keep that heat going.

It is estimated that 70% to 80% of its market is to the U.S. Therefore, 70% to 80% of what is produced right now in that Vavenby mill is loaded on rail and trucks destined for the U.S.

Business of Supply

Companies like Canfor, West Fraser, Interfor are important to our communities. They have expanded into the U.S., and certainly they have other opportunities to continue to do the good work they do. However, it is the communities that are going to be most hurt. It is the coffee shops and small businesses that die in rural communities when they lose their forestry industry. These communities are absolutely critical for British Columbia.

We have talked about the massive billion dollars in terms of supporting Boeing, but there are communities across British Columbia that need the government to get the job done and get a new softwood lumber agreement.

British Columbia said that this is absolutely critical, and the Premier was quoted in *The Globe and Mail*. On March 10, there was an agreement between the Prime Minister and the President that they were going to get the job done in 100 days. At the time, the Premier was optimistic that a top-level agreement was going to head off another Canada-U.S. softwood lumber trade conflict. She talked about the \$3.3 billion, and applauded the commitment at that time to get the job done.

That happened on March 10, but on May 16, again I will talk about the Premier of British Columbia as she was quoted in an article from the *Vancouver Sun*. The headline was “After an initial flurry of optimism, Premier Christy Clark is now anxious about Canada’s prospects for a renewed agreement with the United States...” She said, “I am worried about softwood, period...I think we are going to have to work incredibly hard now to try and get a deal because we are not a lot closer.”

We can see that the premier of the province is very concerned. Those little communities across British Columbia and across the country are hugely concerned in terms of what is going to happen to them if the agreement is not met.

However, what has the Liberal government done?

First, I knew that this agreement was expiring. At my town hall meetings in those rural communities, when we were going to the election, constituents asked what we were going to do about the softwood lumber agreement.

However, this agreement was not mentioned by the Liberal government in the Speech from the Throne, and it was not mentioned in the minister’s mandate letter, which is absolutely stunning. To not have that mentioned in her mandate letter shows what low priority the government has in terms of getting the job done. The Liberals have given lip service to getting the job done.

Certainly when the Prime Minister and President had that 100-day commitment, we hoped that they would get the agreement done, to be quite frank. We wanted it done, and at that time we were thinking that maybe there was a priority to get this done. Clearly, the Conservatives got it done. The Liberals keep saying that this is our fault. They have had a year, and I do not see us being any closer to getting this done.

The only other thing that is important to mention in closing is that it is absolutely critical that not only this is done, but that it is a good deal, that they do not give away the farm in terms of getting a deal done.

I hope that by talking today, it will have impressed upon people, not only in the House but across Canada, how important the agreement is for the basic fabric of our communities, especially our rural communities, in terms of continuing to be an important part of our country.

• (1225)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo mentioned in her speech, I come from one of those urban ridings. I do not have a softwood lumber producer in my riding or workers in the industry, but in my previous employment I did travel extensively through northern Ontario and western Quebec, where I saw many communities that had been devastated by the long-term dispute between Canada and the United States.

I have looked at the motion that has been presented to the House and it contains good words. I come back to the comments made by the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. It is one thing to have this resolution before the House but what bright line in the sand would the member suggest the government not cross in getting the right deal for Canada?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, obviously the first thing is not to have quotas that are significantly lower than the existing quotas.

This is a hard negotiation, but it can be done. Our government showed that it could be done. When we became government in 2006 we managed to get the deal done. It was a reasonable deal and it was accepted across the country. It was not perfect but it was certainly much better than the very challenging circumstances that we had in the many years prior.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. I learned a lot about the forestry industry in her riding.

As I have said in the House many times, the forestry industry provides over 5,000 jobs in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. I am also concerned about the industry’s problems. Some of our businesses have already indicated that they are no longer going to move forward with projects because they are worried that the softwood lumber agreement will not be renewed.

It has been said that the Conservatives reached an agreement before the matter went to court. However, one million dollars was lost as a result of that Conservative deal.

Does my colleague agree that the government should immediately start coming up with a plan B, for example a loan guarantee program, to support our forestry workers and industry just in case a bad agreement leads straight into another trade war that must be resolved before the courts?

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I talked about British Columbia, but as my colleague clearly articulated, this is not just an issue for one province. It is an issue across the country.

This issue was absent in both the mandate letter and the Speech from the Throne.

Business of Supply

Aerospace is a sexy industry. It is perhaps appealing to the Liberal government to look at giving it \$1 billion of taxpayers' money to the aerospace industry.

We are asking the government to take the time, take the energy, and make it a priority and let us get the deal done.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the members who have spoken to this motion for their understanding of this issue. This is a huge issue in front of us. As my colleague mentioned, this was not included in the throne speech and was not in the minister's mandate letter. What is out there is the Liberals' claim that they are going to get it done in 100 days.

Similar to the \$10 billion deficit, which is now three times that at \$30 billion, and similar to their position of taking a little off the top from the rich and giving it to the bottom, which is now about \$2 billion short per year, how can we trust them, given their lack of credibility, when they say they are going to get it done?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, the government likes to spend taxpayers' money and over-spend with the now \$30 billion deficit, but it is not creating an environment for our industries to succeed by having things such as the softwood lumber agreement and pipelines that generate revenue. The Liberals are missing one side of the equation. They are good at spending taxpayers' dollars but they are completely missing the side of the equation in which they could be creating an environment where industries could be successful, whether in forestry or such things as pipelines and our oil industry.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to address the motion before the House today. I would like to start by underscoring a rare moment of unanimity from the speeches and questions earlier today. We all disagree about a lot, but I think we all agree about the importance of the softwood lumber industry to our country. I want to start by saying that it is great to have a chance to talk about it. As Minister of International Trade, I want to assure all members of the House and Canadians how strongly personally committed I am to this issue.

I would also like to respond directly to a comment made by the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. She talked about members, for example from downtown Toronto ridings, and issues they may or may not be familiar with. I am very proud of the number of downtown MPs we have on this side of the House, and as we have already heard from my colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt, very many of them have a deep familiarity with issues ranging across our country's geography and economy. I want to say for the members opposite and for all Canadians who are listening that I personally am very proud to represent the amazing downtown Toronto riding of University—Rosedale. I am equally proud of my own background, having been born and raised in Peace River in northern Alberta. I am personally extremely familiar with and very emotionally connected to the rural economy of this country. One of the things I take greatest pride in, as the Minister of International Trade, is fighting for our rural economy. I want Canadians to know that.

Let me talk a bit about the softwood lumber industry and how important it is to our country. Communities across the country, particularly in rural areas, depend heavily on this sector, which employs nearly 200,000 Canadians. In 2015, 69% of Canada's

softwood lumber exports went to the U.S. which continues to be our largest export market despite excellent work by the industry to expand our markets, particularly in Asia but also in Europe. CETA, which I am working very hard on, could expand those markets further. Softwood lumber production is a driver of economic growth in Canada. It contributed more than \$20 billion to our GDP last year, and maintaining access to the U.S. market is essential.

However, I would like to note that it was under the previous Conservative government that the old softwood lumber agreement expired, on October 12, 2015, when the previous government was still in office. I would like to take this opportunity to share with the House the details of a briefing I had nearly a year ago when we first formed government. I was astonished to learn in one of my first briefings by trade officials that the Conservatives did absolutely nothing to try to negotiate a new deal with the United States, even with the expiry date fast approaching. There was no outreach, no meetings, no telephone calls, and no action to try to protect the thousands of Canadians who work in this essential industry. The deadline was looming and the Conservatives sat on their hands.

Our government, by contrast, understands how important this industry is to Canada, and unlike the previous government, we have been engaged, starting with the Prime Minister, from day one on this issue. The Prime Minister raised the issue of softwood lumber in our first bilateral meeting with President Obama in Manila last year. It was a key issue in our state visit to Washington in March. It was a key issue when President Obama came to Canada in June. We have been on this issue at the highest level. My negotiators were in Washington last week working on the softwood lumber issue. I spoke with Ambassador Mike Froman at length on Friday and I will meet with him again in person in Europe later this week. We are very engaged.

I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank and commend the work of our ambassador, David MacNaughton; of our negotiators, who are working very hard on this fiendishly complex issue; and of the team at the Canadian embassy in Washington. I have been meeting with my U.S. counterpart, Mike Froman, repeatedly around the world, whether in Shanghai or just a couple of weeks ago in Toronto.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

In 35 years, Canada and the United States have been in open conflict four times over softwood lumber. All the stakeholders knew that a new agreement would take time and a lot of hard work.

Business of Supply

When I started working on this portfolio, I was shocked to learn that the Conservatives had not even begun discussions with the Americans on the renewal of the softwood lumber agreement. Precious time was wasted during which the Conservative government could have been moving this file forward.

That is why, immediately after I was appointed, I asked that extensive consultations be held with key stakeholders in the forestry industry, namely the provincial and territorial governments, small and large lumber companies, producers of various types of softwood lumber products, industry associations, unions, and representatives of indigenous groups.

Our government is therefore working very hard in co-operation with the provinces and industry representatives. The negotiating teams are in constant communication. They are in contact daily. The Canadian ambassador to the United States and I are personally involved in the discussions.

I met with my counterpart and industry stakeholders, as well as the workers. When I went to Saguenay, I had the opportunity to speak with them directly. It was very productive.

Let us not forget that softwood lumber was a key aspect of the second state visit to Washington in March. My U.S. counterpart, the United States Trade Representative, and I were expressly instructed, and I quote, to intensively explore all options and report back within 100 days on the key features that would address the issue.

On June 29, following discussions outside the North American leaders' summit held here in Ottawa, the Prime Minister and the President of the United States made a joint statement reiterating their support for a mutually acceptable solution.

Both leaders agreed on nine key elements for a lasting and equitable solution, including exclusion provisions, regional outputs, and transparency, to name a few. This road map continues to guide the negotiations, which, I would like to point out, are ongoing.

On October 12, my American counterpart and I issued a statement indicating that the governments of the United States and Canada remain committed to continuing negotiations in an effort to achieve a durable and equitable solution for North American softwood lumber producers, downstream industries, and consumers.

We recognize that forestry management policies differ across the country, and we are taking those differences into account in our negotiations and as we work toward a national solution. We represent all provinces, including Quebec, the Maritimes, and British Columbia, and will ensure that their needs are reflected in an agreement that benefits all of Canada. Our goal is to sign a good agreement.

Even so, the opposition has been critical. Would it rather we signed a bad agreement? We Liberals are working to negotiate the best deal for Canadians.

MPs and Canadians need to understand that the Government of the United States cannot impose an agreement on its industry even if our two governments do settle on a deal acceptable to us both. That is because, for an agreement to be reached, the American industry must relinquish its legal right to impose tariffs on Canadian exports, a condition that further complicates negotiations.

Another factor that is making negotiations particularly difficult is the level of protectionist rhetoric in the United States.

● (1240)

With the election campaign under way, protectionism is gaining ground and influencing the media and the people. Despite the looming threat of American protectionism, the Prime Minister showed strong leadership during the G20 when he stood up for free trade and open society.

[English]

Also complicating matters is the most protectionist climate in the United States since the Great Depression. This is a serious moment and a serious trend. We are seeing it very much at play not only in the U.S. election but in Europe. We saw it in the lead-up to the Brexit vote, and there is a consequential election soon in Austria, where these themes are very significant.

What we are seeing around the world, both south of the border and in Europe, is a gathering protectionist wave, and it is mixed up with a lot of other things. It is mixed up sometimes with anti-immigrant sentiment. It is mixed up sometimes with xenophobia. This is a powerful backlash against globalization, and it is looking for a target. This broader political environment certainly complicates any trade negotiation, including this one.

Having said that, we are working very hard to secure export markets for Canadian producers, and we are succeeding. In fact, we started our mandate by working hard and successfully repealing protectionist COOL legislation in the United States, notwithstanding the comments made by the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. I was rather surprised to hear him raise this issue. They did not get the puck in the net on COOL. Our government did, and I was very proud to secure that access for our ranchers. We then secured access for Canadian beef in Mexico and in China, which was another real victory for our producers. Finally, we had last month's absolutely breakthrough agreement on securing access for canola exports to China through 2020. This is terrific news for Canadian farmers, including my dad, who hopes that the snow melts off his swaths of canola and that he can finish harvesting this fall.

Canada is pushing back hard against the anti-trade sentiment, and we are securing some tangible wins for our producers. However, we in this House are all very aware of the real challenges. Despite these challenges, our government is doing everything possible to find a solution on softwood lumber that works for industry and safeguards the interests of all Canadians, whether in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, or B.C.

Business of Supply

The negotiating teams speak on the phone almost every day. To date, my officials have had formal meetings with U.S. officials on 16 occasions, most recently last week in Washington. My officials have had more than 65 meetings with Canadian stakeholders, including provinces and industry.

To further understand the views of the industry on both sides of the border, and to move negotiations forward, Ambassador Froman and I hosted a round table with the U.S. industry in Washington, D.C., last month. Then, on October 5, we hosted a round table with the Canadian industry in Toronto. Our Canadian meeting included small and large producers from across the country, including a first-nations-owned business. These meetings shed valuable light on the concerns of both sides as well as on areas where we share similar views, including our joint desire to grow the market for softwood lumber products within North America and abroad.

On October 12, Ambassador Froman and I released a joint statement in which we agreed to continue negotiations and to work to meet the mandate agreed to by President Obama and our Prime Minister when they met in Ottawa in June. In this mandate, our two leaders agreed to nine key features of a durable, equitable deal. Those features include provisions for exclusions and regional exits, to name just a few.

While my officials continue to engage diligently in negotiations, and I am very personally directly involved in that work, we are at the same time preparing for litigation. Should we have to fight, we will be ready to do so. Our softwood lumber producers and workers have never been found in the wrong. International bodies have always sided with our industry in the past.

•(1245)

Canadian officials have been working closely with provinces, territories, and industry since I became minister to prepare for possible U.S. trade action against our softwood lumber products. We are also preparing for the possibility of subsequent litigation at the WTO and under NAFTA. This work has included hiring economic experts, gathering evidence, monitoring U.S. trade law, and preparing our briefs.

While I, personally, and our government are ready to fight in the courts, negotiating an agreement that is good for Canada is the best way to secure stability and predictability for our industry. We will continue our unflinching efforts on this front.

One of our government's top priorities is the economic well-being of the hundreds of Canadians and the hundreds of thousands of families across Canada that depend on the forestry sector and on softwood lumber exports to the United States. That is why we are working so hard to find a solution to the softwood lumber issue.

Let us be clear about what the opposition is asking us to do here today. It is asking us to agree to a deal right now. To do that would mean agreeing to the inadequate deal the U.S. industry is putting forward today. We will not do that. I will not do that. We will keep fighting for the best deal for Canada and for Canadians.

We want a good deal for Canadians, not just any deal. We are hoping for the best and working for the best, but we are preparing for the worst. We are prepared to fight for and defend our industry and our workers in the courts if that is what it takes.

I would like to close by assuring this House, and above all, by assuring Canadians, that the Government of Canada is prepared for any situation and that we are working vigorously and tirelessly to defend the interests of Canadian workers and Canadian producers.

•(1250)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister and I share a lot in common. We are both prairie farm kids. We are both proud of our Ukrainian heritage, and we talk often about a lot of those issues.

However, I have to take offence at some of the things she said in her speech today. The idea that the Liberals put the puck in the net on country of origin labelling is laughable. We know the work Conservatives did as the government, especially the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, when he was the minister of agriculture, who worked tirelessly on actually correcting the country of origin labelling. Essentially, we had to let the Obama administration run out all their legal rights, and time on the clock ran out. It happened because of the hard work done by the previous government.

We are having this debate today because the bromance between the Prime Minister and President Obama is over. We are not having any movement by the government on the softwood lumber debate. Four hundred thousand jobs are at risk right across the country. The government has not even lived up to its own timeline to get this done by October 12.

Where is the actual plan? Why are we not seeing the government sitting down and actually getting this dealt with? Why is it up to the opposition to actually hold consultations across the country to brace the industry for the changes that are about to come?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is absolutely right that he and I have a lot of common. We have a rural prairie background in common, and we enjoy talking about Ukraine. I look forward to doing that at some time in the future.

I can also assure the hon. member, and this is the comment with which I began my remarks, that we get it. We get the importance of the softwood lumber issue. I know that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle get it too. One positive outcome of today's conversation will be to assure Canadians that this House is united in its understanding of the importance of the softwood lumber issue, the industry, and the jobs there.

I want to assure the member opposite that our government is working incredibly hard on this issue. I am very personally engaged in it, and I have been from day one, and so is the Prime Minister, and so are our negotiators. Officials, as I said, have had 66 stakeholder meetings since the beginning of our mandate. I myself have had more than a dozen meetings with the USTR on this issue. We are very engaged. It is a fiendishly complicated issue, but we are working hard.

Business of Supply

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the SLA expired under the Conservative government. I am disappointed today to hear the partisan politics being played, with 260,000 jobs in Canada. This is about deep insecurity in this sector right now. With no agreement, with the date having come and gone, many people in Canada today are wondering when those charges will come from the U.S., what they will be facing, and what the government will do to help them when that happens, because it is quite certain that it will at this point.

I am happy to hear that the government is preparing. The minister mentioned that in her remarks.

The negotiations aside, the sector really does need assurances today from the government. Can the minister elaborate on the plan to support the industry today, and does it include loan guarantees?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, let me start by adding some precision to my previous answer.

Just to be precise, for the record, I have personally had, in person, 10 meetings with the USTR since the beginning of our mandate, and many phone conversations in addition to that.

To the question of what part of the opposition has referred to as a “plan B”, as I said in my remarks, we are hoping for the best, preparing for the worst. We are absolutely negotiating in good faith with our American partners for a negotiated solution, but we understand that it may not happen. We are very much prepared to fight it out. We understand what the implications of that situation would be for our industry.

•(1255)

[Translation]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the softwood lumber issue is very complex and that it involves a number of industry stakeholders across the country.

I commend the minister for her speech and her hard work on this file, and I want to thank her for fighting for our interests.

Forestry is one of the most important industries in the economy of my riding, Laurentides—Labelle, after tourism. It is therefore very important to us that a sustainable, long-term solution be found.

The economy of the Antoine-Labelle RCM was hit hard by the forestry crisis, because that municipality depends on that industry.

Can the minister explain what she is doing to ensure that all industry stakeholders and provincial governments are aware of ongoing initiatives, and that any deal reflects the diversity of interests in the various communities across Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and the work he is doing on this important issue, one that matters to Canada as a whole, including Quebec.

I was in Montreal last week having important discussions about the softwood lumber issue with my Quebec counterparts and industry stakeholders.

The representatives of Quebec appreciate the work we are doing. The Conseil du patronat du Québec commended the government “for

all that it has done in defence of the Quebec forestry industry”. Meanwhile, the Conseil de l'industrie forestière du Québec says that it is “pleased with our position on Quebec's forestry regime”. I am well aware that the Quebec system is unique, and we frequently point that out in our negotiations.

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the minister's words. However, she talked about how many meetings the government has had. Really, what the workers in the forestry industry are looking for are not meetings. They are looking for a quality of outcome that resolves this issue.

Members may recall that back in 2006, when our previous Conservative government was elected, we followed on decades of neglect by the previous government under Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien. They just could not get it done. They could not negotiate an agreement.

Within months of our government being elected, guess what happened. We were able to resolve the softwood lumber dispute. We brought this country nine years of peace.

The current Liberal government has had one year to get this done. It has not.

Do members remember, in Washington, D.C., when the President of the United States and our Prime Minister agreed that within 90 days they would have a framework for resolving this agreement? Where is that framework agreement? Why is the minister not getting it done?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, having sat in the seat I now occupy, that the way to get a deal done is by having meetings and negotiating sessions with our counterparts. That is what we are doing. We are intensively engaged. Thanks to our hard work, we now have an American government USTR, my counterpart Mike Froman, who is very much at the table working with us.

Our announcement at the meeting of the two leaders in Ottawa, which outlined some key elements of an agreement, was an important step. We are intensively pressing on with those talks.

We want a good deal, not just any deal. If we cannot achieve a negotiated agreement, Canada is prepared to fight.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on a question that my friend, the member for Essex, asked.

If I tell the people in my riding who work in sawmills that the government is hoping for the best and preparing for the worst, they are not going to take much stock. I would like the minister, with respect, to give the House some specific details on what plan B is.

•(1300)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his question, and I would hope the member for Essex is my friend too. She is a very good trade critic.

Business of Supply

We are pursuing, as is our responsibility to the people of Canada, a two-track approach right now. We are negotiating in good faith and intensively right now with our American counterparts, and working very closely with our provinces and industry as those negotiations intensify.

I know the U.S. industry and U.S. negotiators follow proceedings in the House carefully on this issue. I want to assure them that we are negotiating in good faith and that we believe a great deal for Canada and the U.S. for our highly integrated industry and markets is achievable. I am working for that.

We understand that the way to get a great deal is to be prepared for the possibility that there is no deal at all. That is why we are working hard on a plan B as well.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the friends and family of Jim Prentice. He was a respected parliamentarian, and my heart goes out to all of my colleagues who are mourning his tragic passing today.

Today's motion is timely, and I am glad my Conservative colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster has brought it forward for debate. The motion urges the government to take all necessary steps to prevent a trade war with the United States over softwood lumber exports.

I absolutely support the motion. For the many thousands of Canadians whose livelihoods depend on this important industry, it is imperative that Canada secures a fair deal with the United States.

Softwood lumber is a vital part of Canada's forestry sector. For many rural communities, it is the backbone of their economy. According to Canada's labour force survey, in 2015, the forest industry accounted for 260,000 direct and indirect jobs, compared to just over 400,000 jobs in 2003. Hundreds of sawmills across Canada have been shuttered, taking with them high quality, well-paid jobs, the kind of jobs on which families and communities depend.

Today, the softwood lumber industry is on the verge of more job losses. With the expiry of the 2006 SLA, producers are bracing for more U.S. tariffs, which will further devastate an industry that has already been hard hit by the long-standing dispute with the U.S., as well as factors like the recent recession, the crash of the U.S. housing market, and domestic issues like the spread of the pine beetle across British Columbian forests.

Canadians producers and workers are hoping that a new SLA will bring fairness and predictability.

The Canada-U.S. softwood lumber dispute first began in 1982. For nearly 35 years, the American industry has argued that Canadian producers benefit from subsidization, a claim that has been defeated time and time again.

Over the years, there have been several managed trade agreements and upon their expiration, more duties slapped on Canadian exports to the U.S. and more costly litigation. Canada has spent in the ballpark of \$100 million in legal fees to defend our position.

After the previous agreement expired in 2001, the U.S. levied \$5.4 billion in duties on Canadian imports, money that should have stayed in the pockets of Canadians. It was the beginning of a decade of massive job loss in the Canadian industry.

Soon after the Conservatives were elected in early 2006, they quickly negotiated a new agreement with little to no consultation with Canadian stakeholders. The result was a very controversial agreement that many argued represented a sellout of Canadian interests. For starters, it was based on the falsehood that Canada's industry was subsidized, which tribunal after tribunal has said is not the case. This set a terrible precedent that the rules of trade did not apply.

The agreement provided an option for Canadian regions of an export tax or a quota with an export tax at a lower rate. It took \$50 million from Canadian industry to create a binding dispute settlement system where the U.S. was able to bring more actions against Canada. Perhaps most egregiously, the agreement allowed the U.S. to keep \$1 billion of the duties it illegally levied on Canadian producers.

At the time, BMO Nesbitt Burns analyst, Stephen Atkinson, said, "Why would you give 22 per cent to your competition?...This money belongs to the companies and their shareholders, and the Canadian government is giving it away."

Canadians were furious with the 2006 SLA. When the Conservatives brought it to Parliament in the form of Bill C-24, the NDP argued vehemently against the agreement. When we look back at this agreement, it is fair to say that the Conservatives caved to American interests. Today, it is imperative that the Liberals do not do the same.

As we know, the 2006 agreement was renewed in 2012 and expired last October. The Liberals love to blame the Conservatives for failing to initiate negotiations on a new agreement. It would seem the Conservatives made zero effort to work on the issue before the election. However, the current government must shoulder the responsibility for its role in failing to get a new deal done in time. For months, the government has hinted at breakthroughs that have never materialized.

In March, the Prime Minister boasted, "I'm confident that we are on a track towards resolving this irritant in the coming weeks and months." That is from the CBC. The fact is that the Liberals broke their own commitment and failed to get a deal done before time ran out.

● (1305)

Beyond softwood specifically, the government does not seem to have a plan for the forestry sector. The federal budget contained no vision for supporting this important industry, which provides jobs right across Canada. It also failed to renew funding for the forest innovation program, which expired earlier this year.

Business of Supply

The international trade committee undertook a brief study of softwood lumber earlier this spring, given that the expiry of the standstill clause was fast approaching. Over the course of two meetings, we heard from witnesses from British Columbia, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada. We heard a lot of frustrations about how Canada had gotten to the place it was at now. The 2006 SLA was a bad deal and the Conservatives did a poor job of negotiating it.

While many concede that another managed trade deal is better than more costly litigation, there is something inherently unfair about the fact that despite continued findings that Canada is not in the wrong, we continue to negotiate agreements that are clearly in the interests of U.S. industry. Many witnesses expressed a desire to see Canada and the U.S. reach a negotiated settlement, one that would work for all our regions. However, I also heard very clearly that people did not want another bad deal. Quebec, for example, has made a lot of changes in its forestry practices and any new agreement must recognize these and other regional differences. A one-size-fits-all solution simply will not do.

One important voice we did not get to hear from at committee was labour. The United Steelworkers, which represents some 40,000 forestry workers, has laid out several requirements for what it would like to see happen now that the 2006 SLA has expired.

It wants the creation of provincial forest community restoration fund. These funds would be invested in workers, forest-dependent communities, and forest health. It wants fair access to the U.S. lumber market and discourages a new quota system. It also wants a guarantee that Canadian producers will have the same access to the U.S. market that other countries will enjoy.

I appreciate the perspective of the United Steelworkers because it represents the workers' point of view. For workers, these three things would help give them greater job security and strengthen, instead of weaken, the industry.

The committee's final report made five recommendations to the government, including that it get a deal done that would serve Canadian interests, that it consult with big and small producers, and that any new deal respect regional differences. The committee submitted its report to the House last spring, but as the summer went on, we continued hearing worry and concern over the lack of progress on the government's part. In August, opposition committee members, including myself, pushed for a summer meeting to get an update from the department.

We also called on the government to broaden its consultations and convene a round table of stakeholders that had been excluded in the past. The Liberals rejected this proposal and, quite shockingly, called the whole meeting a waste of time.

In just a few short months, Canadian producers expect to be hit with U.S. tariffs of around 25%. Mills will be shut down right across Canada. Thousands of jobs will be lost. It is extremely important that the government gets this deal done right and gets it done fast. I hope the government understands the gravity of what these job losses will mean in our communities: thousands of people with no jobs to go to, no more paycheques to bring home, and families worried about how to pay the rent or make the next mortgage payment.

I am from southwestern Ontario and people in Essex know what it is like to lose a lot of jobs in one sector. It is tough and people are resilient, but it is very difficult for families and communities to work through these types of events. I urge the government to act in the interests of those whose jobs are on the line. That means getting the deal right and working collaboratively with the communities that will be impacted by another round of duties.

If the Liberal government is serious about holding out for a good deal, instead of signing a bad one tomorrow, then it owes Canadians more transparency and openness about how it will help Canada's industry weather this impending trade storm. Some in the industry want the government to provide loan guarantees to help them deal with a new round of U.S. duties. If this prevents sawmills from closing and jobs from being lost, then it is imperative that the government provide this support. Canadians deserve answers from the government, not more empty promises and hollow words about meetings and consultations.

The New Democratic Party supports this motion and urges the government to make a new agreement that is in the best interests of Canadians a top priority.

• (1310)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I largely agree with the member for Essex on this very important topic. In a riding like mine, forestry is the major industry after tourism and public services.

I am a bit of a hawk on this issue. I have a question for my colleague. If the Americans do not move in the direction we would like them to move, does she agree that we should fight this out to the end, rather than settling early, and even if it takes a long time, should we have the war?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I would stand in the House and advocate a war with our American neighbours, most certainly. We need to come to some sort of an agreement; that is understandable. However, that is cold comfort to people who today in Canada are uncertain about their jobs and about the impact on their communities. We need to know. We need that transparency that has been promised time and again from the current government. What is the plan right now while the Liberals continue to negotiate? We absolutely would like to see a deal reached, but in the meantime we need some supports in place for those communities and people who will be affected.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Essex for her speech. I am pleased to hear that the New Democrats are going to be supporting the motion.

Business of Supply

One of my colleagues reflected earlier on the fact that we did not see a mention of the softwood lumber issue at all in the minister's mandate letter. We did not hear discussion of it in the throne speech. In fact, we barely heard discussion at all of our vital primary industries in this country. I wonder if my colleague can just reflect on the absence of emphasis, at least in terms of the stated priorities of the current government, on softwood lumber and on our primary industries in general, what that says, and what that suggests about the obligation we have to continually hold the government accountable on this to make sure it is actually doing what is so important for this industry.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I agree that whether it is part of the government's mandate or not, all of us as parliamentarians have a mandate to represent people in every sector who would be affected by trade. Certainly we knew that this was looming, that the softwood agreement had expired. We are in this grace period of time and we all have a responsibility to ensure that the softwood lumber sector and all of its workers, right down to the small producers and the indigenous producers, are protected.

It is very concerning to me that this was not included in the government's mandate letter. It should absolutely be a key focus. We heard today that the minister is working on the agreement and that is ongoing, but what we would like today are some answers on how people can cope with the impending tariffs they will be facing and that will be slapped on Canadian producers, in all honesty, as soon as this week.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very informative speech.

I think everyone in the House would agree that we need a good deal. To send a clear message, I want to hear my colleague's thoughts on something. If the government were already showing strong leadership by having a plan B, such as a loan guarantee program, for example, what impact would that have on the negotiations, and how might that affect the outcome if the matter ends up in court?

[English]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her work on this file. She certainly represents well the constituents she is here to represent.

I would say that the plan B absolutely has to include a loan guarantee program. If that were in place right now, it maybe would take some pressure off of the negotiations and the time that we are up against where we have no agreement. It at least would provide some stability for those who are in the sector, knowing that they would not have to come up with the legal fees they would need to battle this out in court, when time after time it has been proven that we are not at fault here in Canada. I believe that any type of plan B from the government needs to include loan guarantees to provide some security to those people in the sector.

• (1315)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge my colleague's hard work on committee. This summer, we actually tried to call an emergency committee meeting on softwood lumber. During that meeting, one of the Liberal members from Quebec called the meeting a waste of time and

money. I wonder if my colleague could comment on that member's comment, and on what she thinks the committee could have done this summer that would have maybe brought some focus onto this topic.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague on the committee and for his great work on this file as well.

I was quite shocked by the comments of the member from Quebec when we met in an emergency meeting here in Ottawa over this very important issue. We all knew this was looming, that the agreement was coming to an end, and there was a lot of uncertainty across the sector, both by the workers and by the mills. To hear that comment coming from someone who is sitting on the international trade committee was deeply concerning to me. It is never a waste of time to stand here in the House or to sit on a committee to represent Canadians. In fact, that is what we have been sent here to do.

I believe that in the summer a good motion was brought forward by my colleagues, which I did support, seeking to have a round table, seeking to put some pressure, and to have some collaboration at that critical point. I thank the member for his work on the committee and I support the motion that the members are bringing forward today.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak here this afternoon in favour of the motion because I am concerned about the future of Canada's forest industry.

I come from British Columbia, which, as most people know, has some of the most magnificent forest resources anywhere in the world. From the rainforests of cedar and hemlock on the coast to the vast pine, fir, and spruce forests of the interior, British Columbia produces more than half the softwood lumber in Canada.

The forest industry has been a critically important part of the British Columbian economy for over a century. Today, it contributes \$12 billion every year to the B.C. economy. It provides \$2.5 billion in direct government revenue in British Columbia. It creates 145,000 jobs in British Columbia alone. That is one in every 16 jobs in British Columbia. That figure was touted to be closer to one in every two jobs when I was younger, but the industry has been hit hard over the past few decades.

The softwood lumber agreement of 2006 came after over 20 years of disputes between the two countries. At the heart of those disputes was the claim by the United States that the Canadian forest industry was subsidized by the way companies paid for the harvesting of wood from public lands. That claim has repeatedly been repudiated by both international and American tribunals. I think we won something like 14 legal decisions in a row between 1982 and 2005. Despite these victories, the actions of the U.S. industry brought uncertainty to the lumber export market and cost our industry billions of dollars.

The softwood lumber agreement did bring back certainty to lumber export access and costs, but the Canadian industry paid a very high price for that certainty and many mills did not survive those added costs and quotas; especially, after years of wearying trade battles with the United States.

Business of Supply

In my riding, the Weyerhaeuser mill in Okanagan Falls closed in 2007, putting over 200 people out of work. The Pope & Talbot mill in Midway closed in 2007 as well, but fortunately, has been reopened by the Vaagen Brothers, which has invested in new equipment to create a highly efficient mill that uses the smaller logs that are easier to find in today's wood supply. The Atco lumber company in Fruitvale closed its lumber operation around the same time to concentrate on veneer products for plywood, which are not subject to softwood lumber quotas and tariffs. The surviving mills in my riding strive to be as efficient as possible, trying to get the right logs to the right mill. It does not always work, the system is far from perfect, but for the moment the mills are doing well.

As elsewhere in Canada, waste wood in all the local mills is usually chipped and sent to the local pulp mill, in my case, it is the Celgar mill in Castlegar, to add a bit to the bottom line for the mills. The pulp mills also depend on the input of those chips. I heard testimony from a pulp mill representative, a couple of weeks ago, at the finance committee pre-budget consultation in Alberta, that pulp mills in Alberta would be hooped, in his words, if local sawmills closed because of inaction on the softwood lumber agreement.

As I tour my riding today, I see a forest industry that is innovative and efficient, each mill specializing in some niche that will allow it to survive and hopefully thrive. I imagine that is the case across British Columbia and across Canada.

The industry faces challenges from all sides today, and one of the main challenges these companies face is uncertainty. When I ask representatives from the forest industry about a new softwood agreement, they agree that the former agreement has brought some amount of certainty and stability to the lumber market in Canada, but feel that it failed, in some areas, to protect Canada's interests in an unfair trade negotiation.

The forest industry would like to see the agreement renewed, but not at any cost. It does not want to see a new agreement that is more punitive than the last, since it is clear that countervailing duties are not legally warranted at all. It recognizes that we need an agreement that is flexible to the needs and circumstances of the different regions in Canada.

● (1320)

The Liberal government promised quick action on this file. It repeatedly said these negotiations were an example of how things go right when the President of the United States is a good friend of the Prime Minister, but it has failed to deliver and the Canadian forest industry is clearly worried about the future. We need to get a new agreement in place. The government can and must do more for the forest industry than just get this softwood agreement.

The industry, especially in British Columbia, has been working hard to build new international markets for our lumber products. It has been working on innovative new wood products and new ways to use wood in buildings. It would be a great boost to the Canadian forest industry as a whole if the federal government instituted a wood-first policy that promoted the use of wood in government building projects.

In my hometown of Penticton there is a company called Structurlam, which builds huge glulam beams for beautiful structural

supports for large buildings. It also manufactures crosslam wood panels, which combine with the beams to allow the construction of very tall buildings without steel and concrete. The company just completed an 18-storey project at the University of British Columbia, called Brock Commons. It is the tallest wood building in the world, and because the parts are built off-site, the Brock Commons building took only 66 days to construct. The UBC project used 1.7 million board feet of British Columbia lumber. Structurlam gets its lumber locally at mills such as Kalesnikoff in Castlegar, so the benefits are widespread.

If we could support domestic markets in this way, it could really help the forest industry in our country and partially shield us from the political vagaries of American trade negotiations.

Despite the challenges it has faced over the past 30 years or so, the British Columbia forest industry is very much alive, and is still very important to British Columbia and the Canadian economy. However, it faces serious challenges: a future with a declining wood supply, a future with more frequent catastrophic forest fires and insect epidemics due to climate change, a future with increased uncertainty around the demand for wood products, and a future with rising costs associated with trade disputes with the United States.

We need the government to do everything in its power to support the forest industry. We need a new softwood lumber agreement that is fair and flexible across all regions of Canada, an agreement that will bring certainty to the forest industry. British Columbia and hundreds of thousands of Canadians across our country depend on it.

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

Mr. Speaker, I find it important to emphasize that, whether it is the Prime Minister or cabinet or my caucus colleagues, their understanding of the importance of the industry is very real. We have a government that is aggressively trying to protect the interests of the forestry sector. Our softwood lumber industry not only provides thousands of direct jobs but it also provides even more indirect jobs. We understand the importance of this particular industry to our economy.

Would the member not agree that it is best to negotiate and attempt to get the very best deal as opposed to trying to appease the few who are asking for the deal to get done? Would he not recognize that at times an issue has to be forced to the very end in order to maximize the benefits for our workers and for our country as a whole?

● (1325)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, the forest industry does not want an agreement at any cost. We want a good agreement. We do not want an agreement that would be more punitive than the one that we have.

Business of Supply

We recognize that perhaps it is a difficult time to negotiate an agreement with the protectionism that is going on in the United States. I talked to Duncan Davies, who is the CEO of Interfor, when he appeared before the trade committee. He pointed out that the two conditions under which the Americans get cranky about softwood lumber are when the Canadian dollar is low and when lumber prices are low. Right now the Canadian dollar is not very high and lumber prices are going up. It probably would have been a better time if the Conservatives, once they had extended the agreement by two years in 2013, had negotiated then, when the Canadian dollar was more or less at par with the American dollar and lumber prices were looking better.

Here we are today and the Liberal government has to take the reins and get us a good deal. Lumber prices are good and are getting better than they were. The government has to get a new agreement. As I said, we do not want an agreement at any cost. The government should provide supports to the industry beyond this agreement that would keep it thriving pending the outcome of the negotiations.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for the considerable work he has done both in the committee and on this side of the House in holding the government's feet to the fire on this matter.

The member mentioned a gentleman by the name of Duncan Davies, who is the president and CEO of Interfor. It is one of Canada's largest forestry producers. However, in recent years, it has divested itself, as some of our major operations have, of Canadian operations and invested south of the border.

When I questioned Mr. Davies in that same committee meeting about the number of operations and percent of operations in the United States versus in Canada, he said that, indeed, Interfor's U.S. operations were 80% or greater, meaning that 20% or less are on the Canadian side. However, he is at the table with Global Affairs and guiding those representatives in their negotiations.

Does it not bother my hon. colleague that we have producers who have increased their U.S. operations at the table negotiating on behalf of Canada?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, at that same committee meeting where Mr. Davies was testifying, when asked about the kind of conflict of interest he might have in this regard, he did point out that Interfor and the various other Canadian companies that have bought up U.S. mills still have considerable Canadian operations, and they do not want those operations to get in trouble if we have a bad deal. He made that claim. I do not want to defend his words, but that was his argument.

My point is that whoever is at the table, they should be speaking for Canada, and I hope we can get a good deal very soon.

• (1330)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

It is disturbing that we are at this point today where some 400,000 jobs are in jeopardy across Canada going forward this winter, not 200,000 jobs that the minister claimed were at stake. That is approximately 650 communities that do not have a certain future

because the Liberal government decided not to think seriously about having an agreement on softwood lumber in place.

If we look at the minister's priorities and the mandate letter she was given when she took on the role, softwood lumber was nowhere to be mentioned. When we talked about softwood lumber at committee and said that we needed to have an emergency meeting to talk about it to see where things were at, the committee member from Quebec called it a waste of time and money. That shows the attitude of the Liberal government toward the forestry sector and all resource jobs in total. Its disdain for that sector is obvious. The fact that it did not make it a priority is very disappointing.

The Prime Minister talks about his special relationship with President Obama. That special relationship got him a dinner at the White House and a whole pile of photo ops with the President. It brought the president here, where they embraced the "bromance" right in the area of the Chair in June. However, if that relationship is so special, we would think he would have been able to say, "You know what? I need this deal done, Mr. President." He could have done this in June. Then we would have no insecurity in this sector going into the winter season. However, he chose not to. I think he took his time and decided to have a photo op instead of sitting down and talking seriously about getting this done, noting how important it was to Canadians.

I want to remind the House that the previous government not only got the negotiations done within the first three months of taking office in 2006, but also renegotiated the agreement in 2012, both with two different presidents. The Liberals talk about how the previous government has such a bad relationship with the U.S. when in fact it was able to use that relationship and get things done for Canadian workers. Now we have this supposed bromance, which is nothing that can be cashed in on.

I know the Liberals like to deal with their friends. That is quite obvious from the history of the Liberal Party if we go back to the Gomery report, and the like. However, they do not realize that dealing internationally is done in a business-to-business format and that we have to take these things seriously, that when we sit down at the table the friendship ends when the negotiations start, as my colleague said in a press conference today. However, they do not seem to get that. They do not understand what is at stake and what is important.

There are some other things that the previous government managed to get done: the beyond-the-border action plan of 2011 to expedite legitimate trade and travel across the border, which is something that needs more co-operation on to keep moving forward; the Canada-United States energy dialogue in 2009 to strengthen the bilateral co-operation and development of clean energy technology; the expansion of the Nexus program to make it easier for pre-approved individuals to cross the border; and the Gordie Howe bridge. There are many examples of the previous government's success in dealing with Washington, both with Democrats and Republicans, yet this bromance produces nothing but photo ops.

Business of Supply

If I go back to the riding and talk about jobs—because this does impact my riding substantially—I look at the mill at Carrot River, for example. This mill was expanded. Millions of dollars was spent in redoing the line. It was putting some stability back into a small town where forestry is very important. I now have to go back to those workers and tell them that the Liberals did not try to negotiate a deal until the last minute and that I cannot promise them any type of bankability as they move forward. Therefore, I have to go to the guy who owns 10 trucks and probably has millions of dollars tied up in equipment and tell him I do not know what the future holds. I have to go to the employees of that sawmill and tell them that the Liberals have not done it and that I do not know what the future holds for them. These are families. These are people who will be going into Christmas unsure of what they can or cannot spend on gifts for their kids. These are people who invest in things like tree cutters, parts, and service across the community as a whole. They do not know what they can or cannot do now because there is no stability in the market.

I was in Prince Albert when the mill shut down. That was back at the time of the old trade dispute in 2004 and 2005, when the pulp mill and the sawmill were shut down. The impact on the community was devastating. If it were not for Fort McMurray and the growth in that sector, it would have been even more devastating and taken the feet right out of the city of Prince Albert. It would not be the city it is today.

●(1335)

We can look at the resource sector and see how important it is to our economy. To see the disdain that the Liberals show towards it and their inability to get results, whether in a softwood lumber agreement or a pipeline to port, shows they do not understand the importance of this sector.

The Liberals used the election and the protectionist climate as an excuse. The Conservatives negotiated the last extension agreement in 2012 during a presidential election. Protectionist measures are nothing new in dealing with the United States. We must deal with them as they come up. We can remember dealing with buy American in the House, and how we had to deal with those issues as they came up. The Conservatives dealt with them.

Country of origin labelling is another example. We were able to resolve those issues while we were in government. It took a lot of hard work and consensus building with our American partners, but we did the hard work and we did it together.

If we look at country of origin labelling and what was involved in getting that result the way we needed it, it was not just litigation. It was actually a matter of working with like-minded professionals, industries, and people who understood the importance of having Canadian beef come across the border, the importance of consumers, and the importance of building alliances down in the U.S. with those types of groups to put political pressure on Congress to say this needed to change. We got it done.

One other concern I have about the government is the secrecy of negotiations. When I go to industries or the provinces and ask what is in the negotiations, what is being proposed, what is being offered, they do not know and cannot tell me because the government will not tell them. I say they could sign a confidentiality agreement, and

then at least they would know what is involved in the negotiations. It is not even being offered.

The minister is basically doing these negotiations in secret, in private, with only four major players who have an interest on both sides of the border sitting at her side. How can that be fair to the small players in the sector, the small forestry companies in Canada? How can that be fair to the provincial ministers, who do not know? Why do we have to go to the U.S. to find out bits and pieces of what is in the agreement? That is so disappointing.

How does Parliament function without knowing what is in the agreement? Again, I encourage the minister to come to Parliament and tell us what the government is proposing, what is being put on the table, what the numbers are, if she is using a quota system in the proposal or a tax exemption or taxing system such as tax pricing? What is it?

Those are things the committee could have worked on this summer. Those are the things we could have assisted the government in moving our sector forward and seeing this agreement happen. However, it thought it was a waste of time and money.

Forgive me when I do not take the government seriously when it says it takes this seriously. Forgive me when I look across the aisle and see that the priorities of the Prime Minister lie somewhere else, and not on dealing with this issue, because I do not believe him, and Canadian forestry workers definitely do not believe him.

Let us look at the jobs at stake. I go back to Carrot River, Big River, Meadow Lake, and look at the sector as a whole. It is a very tight-knit sector. When one piece of it fails, it has domino effects on other areas. For example, with the closure of the pulp mill at The Pas, all of sudden Carrot River will not have a source for its chips to go to in The Pas. What will they do with their chips? They have to go to Hudson Bay or somewhere else.

If the saw mill is taken out of Carrot River, then how does Hudson Bay, which shares a forestry management agreement with the company out of Carrot River on hardwood, get their hardwood? When hardwood is cut, the softwood is cut at the same time. It is a coordinated effort, so it is harvested properly.

As we can see, when one of these things fails, the domino effect goes into the sector, and not just into the softwood sector but also the hardwood sector, into particleboard, into pulp and paper. Whole sectors start to fail. The cluster becomes no longer viable.

I will not go into the carbon tax. I will not even talk about what that would do to the sector. Again, let us talk about 11 cents a litre or 45 cents a litre and what that does to the price of diesel. All of this forestry product moves out of the bush by truck. It has to compete with people around the world, including our American competitors and other markets. They do not have a carbon tax. They are not going to have a carbon tax. Yet we are expected to pay for that.

In fact, when we look at the forestry sector, what is so ironic is that these trees sequester so much carbon. It is amazing. It is about one tonne per metre, I understand. If we look at a per acre basis, we can see the amount of carbon that our forestry sector sequesters. When that tree is cut and another tree is planted, again, more carbon is sequestered.

Business of Supply

•(1340)

In closing, this is something that the government needed to take seriously. It did not. The result is that we do not have an agreement in place. If the Liberals could do one thing right now, it would be to get a stay of litigation. They could say that while they are negotiating, no illegal activity should be going on in the background, so that there are no duties coming into play at this point in time.

These are some of the things they could do at this point to bring some stability to the market, for this year at least. The best thing they could do is get a good agreement. However, in order to get an agreement, they have to be at the table and have to understand the impacts of their decisions. I do not think they are at the table seriously, and I do not think they seriously understand the impacts.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the speech, I was thinking that the member might be simplifying the negotiation process. The Canadian government is working with the provinces, territories, first nations, stakeholder groups, and industry representatives. It has had 50 such meetings since October 2015. It had meetings last week with the American government to work on this file.

It seems there is a suggestion that we are not meeting with the other stakeholders and that this is somehow a simpler process. Could the member elucidate on how simple the process is in his mind?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, the process is not simple. Governing is not a simple thing. I believe they are having meetings, but are they listening? Are they actually consulting or just talking? That is the concern I have. Are they actually informing their partners on the proposals they are putting forward in Washington D.C.? They are not, because they do not know or understand what the government is proposing. It is being done in secret. It is done quietly behind closed doors. The big four know, but no one else does.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the member's comments. We have been in government now for less than a year, and our government has aggressively pursued this issue.

The former Harper government would have been aware of the situation that was looming, yet it chose not to do anything about it. That is a very important point that has been lost. Ever since our government has taken office this issue has been raised, on a multitude of different levels, including with stakeholders, as my colleague pointed out.

If the member really believes, as we believe, that those jobs are so valuable to our economy and that this is such an important industry to our economy, would he not agree that the best agreement we can achieve is what we should be striving for, not to appease the Conservative caucus, but rather to look at what is in the best interests of the industry as a whole? People should be comfortable in knowing that we have a government that is aggressively pursuing this file, and we are not going to settle for the sake of settling. We want an agreement that is going to make a positive difference for the industry as a whole. Would he not agree that is what Canadians need?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I laugh at the member's assumptions. He said that they have only been in power for a year.

We did it in the first three months, and then we renegotiated in 2012. It was in fact with the same president who sits there today, who supposedly they have this great bromance with. They should cash it in and get results for Canadian jobs. That is all we are asking.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has been a member of Parliament for eight years, as I have. Can he ever remember a Liberal asking a question about softwood lumber in the eight years that he has been a member of Parliament?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I do have a good memory, and I have to acknowledge that they have not. In fact, in the committee this summer, we tried to do an emergency meeting on softwood lumber. Do you know what was said? The member from Quebec said that it was a waste of time and money. How shameful. Now they tell us they are taking it seriously? I am sorry we interrupted her summer holidays to talk about this issue, but this is not a waste of time and money. This should have been talked about and dealt with a long time ago, and they have failed.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too laugh at the vim and vigour we are seeing from the other side, defending how they have only been in government for 10 months, and gosh darn, it has been a priority for them.

If this were such a priority for the government, how many times was it mentioned in their campaign, in the minister's mandate letter, or how about in the Speech from the Throne, the very first address to the House?

•(1345)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, again, we should ask the opposition party how many times it talked about it, but I am not sure what kind of answer we would get.

However, it was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. It is not in the minister's mandate letter. It is not a priority, obviously, and it has not been a priority. Now members are sitting there saying, "oh my God, 400,000 jobs". In fact, they call it 200,000 jobs. There are 400,000 at stake, and the Liberals do not know what to do. It is obvious. It shows up in their actions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a duty to speak to this matter today. Since arriving here in 2007, I have always felt that it has been my responsibility to stand up for the forestry economy of all regions of Canada, from northern British Columbia to the Atlantic regions, in order to protect communities, because the forestry industry is often their sole provider of jobs.

I have always been told that people are judged more by their actions than by their words. We can say many things, but we have to look at the facts and the results. A bill to abolish the title of minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec was introduced recently. They abolished the position of the political lieutenant for the regions. I get it: they do not want complaints from the regions. No one is going to stand up for their region because they will be rapped on the knuckles.

Business of Supply

The Economic Development Agency of Canada was often the only department to wave the Canadian flag in Quebec's regions. People never see other federal government departments or officials. Now the government is going to abolish the department of Economic Development. Perhaps if the sawmills we are talking about today were not located in Rivière-aux-Rats, Port-Cartier, Girardville, or Saint-Thomas-Didyme, which are in my riding, but rather in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, or Winnipeg, we would have heard quite a bit about them earlier.

Today, the situation affects 400,000 jobs across Canada in regions that have fewer voters. However, it is important that we maintain the economic health of all regions in Canada so there are jobs for the people.

Our party came to power in 2006, and I arrived in September 2007. The government really did not need me to deal with the softwood lumber issue because it had already done so. What was the situation when the government came to power in January after 10 years of inaction by the Liberal government? Between 27% and 37% of export duties and \$6 billion were frozen in a trade war with the United States. We dealt with that in three or four months. In April, everything was settled. We brought in \$5 billion out of the \$6 billion.

Members are saying that Canada gave the United States a billion dollars, but what they fail to mention is that we brought in \$5 billion. We brought in \$5 billion of the \$6 billion that was on the table and we gave that money back to the forestry industry. We signed a deal that brought 10 years of peace and stability.

Of course, the former minister had begun working on this issue. He had begun discussions but not negotiations. He too consulted with our Canadian partners. What was said earlier is not true. We began paving the way for future negotiations. We were moving firmly in that direction.

When we look at which party or which government resolved international trade issues in the past, it is not the current government. It is our former government and Brian Mulroney's government.

The Liberals have always been more reluctant to sign trade deals, so we need to be careful. We jumped in. We opened doors and we signed a 10-year agreement.

As my colleague said earlier, we are talking about softwood lumber, but those who know forestry know that trees must first be felled and limbed, loaded onto trucks, and transported to sawmills. Milling produces byproducts that go to secondary and tertiary manufacturing facilities, which make cushions, mattresses, and all kinds of other things. Wood chips go to pulp and paper mills. All of that will be jeopardized. Not just lumber mills, but the entire forestry industry supply chain will be jeopardized, from truckers to equipment manufacturers that sell machinery used to cut and process wood.

The government has been in power for a year but says it has not had enough time to get anything done. It blames everything on the big, bad former Conservative government that did not get the job done. The Liberals wanted power. They have it. Now they have to keep their promises. It is up to them to seal a deal for this whole economic sector.

We understand that the deal with the Americans has to benefit the country and all regions of the country. Of course we agree with that; that is what we did in 2006.

Whenever someone tells me we have to reach an agreement that is good for the whole country, I say we did.

What is currently at play? When we came to an agreement in 2006, the provinces could opt for percentages with no quota, or unrestrained exports, as British Columbia did. It was between 5%, 10%, and 15% according to the prevailing price per thousand board feet. That is how the measure was drafted. The price could vary, and accordingly, so did the export percentage.

It was 5%, 10%, or 15%. Now we are being told that if there is no agreement, and I hope there will be one, the cost of exporting will be 25%. That is hundreds of millions of dollars that will go toward export costs instead of to jobs or the people who are already working in this sector.

● (1350)

We read the press release that said that negotiations were ongoing and that the government hoped to conclude an agreement. I hope so too.

The Canadian province that exports the most lumber to the United States is British Columbia. Statistically speaking, the numbers are there. Quebec is the second-largest exporter. More importantly, especially seeing that 40 Liberal members come from the regions in Quebec, Quebec exports roughly 48% of its softwood lumber products. In other words, half of its two-by-fours go to the United States. Of this 48%, 98.5% of the lumber exported from Quebec goes to the United States. It is easy to see why this agreement is so important. That is why Quebec's entire forestry industry is quite anxious today. They know what is at stake.

Today, it takes a lot of courage and I hope that my colleagues across the way have that courage. I would like the government to deal with this issue and to conclude an agreement that is good for the entire country, one that respects regional differences. Quebec changed how it allots timber: 75% remains public and 25% is sold at auction, as is the case in a number of U.S. states.

We would like the particularities of every region of the country, including the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, and the western provinces, to be recognized and a good deal to be negotiated, rather than having to take our partners to court. Of course we are enjoying a warmer relationship with the U.S., as the Liberals claim. All these grand dinners and accolades are all well and good, but what about jobs, results, and salaries for those workers?

Why are we even talking about job creation? Some 400,000 jobs already depend on that deal. Before we create any more, let us protect the ones we have. This sector already provides a lot of good jobs. It is the government's duty to reach an agreement quickly to give these workers some job security.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech made by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean, who, like me, comes from a forestry region. I have a very important question for him.

Business of Supply

If his party managed this issue so well when it was in government, why did the previous deal expire during that time, and why was this issue not resolved before his party left office? If it was so easy, why was his party incapable of doing it?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, there were 10 years of trade wars with the Americans dating back to 2006 when a former Liberal government was in office. There was an agreement from 2006 to 2013. Then, we agreed with the Americans to renew the agreement for two years, until 2015. In 2015, there was a one-year grace period until 2016.

It is clear that our government provided better stability for the forestry industry than the former Liberal government did. We believe that it is important to continue to move forward on this issue. We resolved this issue in four months. However, the Liberals have been in power for three times four months and they still have not resolved it. We believe that the most important objective is to reach an agreement today.

The Liberals never talk about the money that was recovered by Canada during the negotiations. I would therefore like to remind members that \$6 billion was on the table and we recovered \$5 billion of it. We helped the Canadian forestry industry. Now, the Liberals are in power and it is their responsibility to resolve the problem. They need to do so.

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. We both represent a riding in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area, which is a forestry region. We have the same problems since our ridings are right next door to each other.

It is true that a good negotiated agreement would be a good thing, but I would like my colleague to elaborate on what such an agreement might consist of. There has been a lot of talk about helping our forestry industry and sending a strong message of support to our workers given what is currently happening, even in my colleague's riding. For example, one business is no longer going forward with its plan to expand. Workers are very concerned.

What does my colleague think about a support program and a loan guarantee program, for example?

• (1355)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, 25% of Quebec's standing timber is in my riding.

Every day, no matter where I go, I meet worried workers who have lost their jobs, or who see that their employer is not investing in new equipment. There were some with us yesterday on the plane bringing us back to Ottawa. There are equipment manufacturers who are making more efficient planers, for example. All these people are worried about their future.

I know one thing for certain: by revealing our negotiating strategies, it is very likely that the Americans will say that they will resolve it, and we will not be allowed to do so. When I was minister, I never revealed details of ongoing negotiations, and I would not do so today.

It is not for us to speak on behalf of the government about what should be in the agreement. The agreement should respect the individual needs of all regions and provinces, and find solutions.

I would prefer that we first have a negotiated agreement instead of looking for solutions, which will happen in due course. Meanwhile, there is still time to negotiate.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked from a Quebec perspective in good part, and I concur with him. Whether it be for residents in Quebec, and we know how important this industry is to Quebec, or those in other provinces, in particular, British Columbia and my home province of Manitoba, they are all at the table in different ways and different formats. Stakeholders are trying to ensure that the government does what is necessary, which is to achieve the best agreement possible, which will better serve this industry in the years ahead. We all acknowledge that.

However, would the member not agree that it is in the best interest of the industry as a whole that we not settle, that we strive to get the best deal that would preserve and encourage growth in the industry? We should be holding this up high. We should say what we want to get and not attempt to settle for anything less until we are absolutely convinced that there is nowhere further for us to go.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to follow one of my friends from B.C. and another friend from Saskatchewan. We are talking about all of the country in our speeches today. I talk about Quebec, because I come from there. However, we need to have a deal. We had a good deal in the past, and we cannot accept less. We already had a deal, which we can continue to work on and build on to get results.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Roberval, the deputy leader of the official opposition, has significant experience in public administration as a veteran minister in the previous government. The lumber industry is vital to Canada's economy and especially to Quebec's economy.

Can my colleague talk about the risks we will be exposing ourselves to unless and until we have a proper long-term softwood lumber agreement with the United States?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning of my speech, I am very concerned about decisions this government is making that affect regional economic development and the link between central and remote regions.

The government did away with regional ministers and is getting rid of the minister for economic development agencies of Canada for the regions. There will be nobody left to speak on behalf of the regions. I know that other members will pick up the slack, but those roles were part of the structure of government.

Considering that nearly 50% of Quebec's softwood lumber output is exported to the United States, it is vital that we get to an agreement and make sure it is watertight.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe, but some mothers who lose their livelihoods during their parental leave are not entitled to employment insurance.

Imagine how hard it must be for these families to lose a source of income right after a new baby is born. Imagine what this would do to a single mother. The problem is that employment insurance benefits are calculated based on hours accumulated during the previous year, and young mothers do not accumulate enough hours because of their leave.

The law provides an exception for preventive withdrawals, but the vast majority of mothers are being left out. I will therefore be introducing a bill to right this wrong.

Let us face it; this injustice is unacceptable and the solution is very straightforward. We told the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour exactly which regulation needs to be changed four months ago. The time has now come to act. The women of Quebec should no longer be punished for becoming mothers.

* * *

● (1400)

*[English]***FAMILIES OF MEMBERS**

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to pay tribute to our families, which a year ago were putting up with long days and late nights as we were wrapping up our campaigns. Each of us is here to represent our communities, and families are the foundation of these. Without the tireless support of our families, we would not be able to be here serving our country.

Today, I have 12 of my close family with me, including my mother-in-law Brigid Malone from Winnipeg, my wife Barbara, our daughters Shauna, Carolyn, and Christina, and their spouses and their families, visiting our national capital region and cheering me on as they always have.

Let us never forget that each of us has those at home and across the country who love and support us. On behalf of the entire House, I would like to thank all of them.

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JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I issued a news release calling on the Liberal government to support my private member's bill, Cassie and Molly's law, as part of the government's broader strategy to address gender-based violence.

In Canada, there are no provisions in the Criminal Code to protect pregnant women, a gap in the law which leaves Canadian women vulnerable. My bill is specific and targeted, adding new charges for crimes against a pregnant woman that harm or end her pregnancy.

Canadians want this bill. In a poll I commissioned from Nano Research, 70% were supportive of Cassie and Molly's law, with support among women even higher at 75%.

I want to be clear. This legislation would not in any way change or impact the law, or limit or undermine abortion in Canada. The leading constitutional law firm, Supreme Advocacy, confirms this in its thorough report on Cassie and Molly's law, of which every member in the House has a copy.

Please join me in supporting common-sense legislation that denounces violence, stands up for victims, and protects pregnant women.

* * *

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, Queen's University celebrated its 175th anniversary.

[Translation]

This important milestone demonstrates Queen's University's initiative and excellence in the field of education.

[English]

This past weekend, Queen's celebrated homecoming. The three days of Homecoming 2016 saw a record-setting 100 classes and groups participate in the celebration and mark the completion of their successful initiative campaign.

No homecoming would be complete without a football game. The Queen's Gaels were able to welcome alumni and students to its first homecoming game in the revitalized Richardson Stadium, and wowed the crowd with a 55-5 victory.

[Translation]

To everyone who returned to Kingston this past weekend, welcome home.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to mark the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

In Canada, a wealthy country, one in ten people live in poverty. Despite unanimous consent of the House, poverty rates in Canada remain that high. There is no possible justification for this type of inaction. There needs to be leadership.

The NDP has long had a plan to help the most vulnerable, middle-class families, and seniors struggling to make ends meet. That is why I introduced Bill C-245 to reduce poverty. My bill would create a federal plan to eliminate poverty so that no one is left behind.

I invite all my hon. colleagues to read my bill and support it at second reading.

*Statements by Members***THE CONSTANTIN FAMILY**

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Small Business Week being in full swing, today I have the privilege of having members of the Constantin family from Saint-Eustache as my guests in the House of Commons to congratulate them for the success of their intergenerational enterprise.

The Constantin family has owned the Constantin sugar shack and reception halls for 75 years, and the business is known throughout the region for its maple syrup and local products. For four generations, the Constantin family has remained passionate about the business.

I remember going there when I was a child and really enjoying the maple taffy. I am very pleased that Jeannette Constantin is still making the desserts, as she has done since 1947.

This being Women's History Month, I tip my hat to you, Jeannette, for your dedication. You are a very inspiring woman for all Canadians.

Finally, I congratulate the Constantins for their dedication and for showing everyone what it means to still be passionate about a business 75 years and four generations later.

* * *

• (1405)

[English]

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONFEDERATION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would you hold a birthday party for a seven-year-old boy, but not allow him to come? Would you stage a lavish 50th wedding anniversary party, but not tell the honoured couple? Of course not, but that is exactly what the Liberal government is doing.

Next year, Canada will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, but the Liberals have decided that Confederation and Canadian history are not welcome at the party. The only themes Liberals will allow to be supported are youth, the environment, diversity, and aboriginal reconciliation. Confederation is not a theme of the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

This absurd situation is just the latest salvo in the Liberal war on history. Instead of being ashamed of our history, we should celebrate the events that have built the best country in the world and honour the contributions of the Fathers of Confederation, like Macdonald, Cartier, Brown, and McGee. Confederation was an act of unification, of provinces, of languages, and of people around a single idea: the country of Canada.

Let us end the Liberal war on history and, next year, celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

* * *

[Translation]

HURRICANE MATTHEW

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support and that of the people in my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook for the relief efforts to help those affected by the flooding in Cape Breton.

As members know, communities that face terrible situations such as this need a lot of support, and I would like to commend the families and individuals involved for their efforts.

[English]

As a native of Cape Breton, I am extremely proud of the people of Cape Breton and how they came to support each other, which they always do. They never leave anybody behind in tough situations. I am proud to be a native of Cape Breton.

I would like to thank the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness for being present on the ground, helping and talking with individuals about our government. I want to thank, of course, the members of Parliament for Sydney—Victoria and Cape Breton—Canso, and the premier of Nova Scotia for being on the ground, talking, sharing, and showing how Nova Scotia will support all Cape Bretoners.

* * *

HURRICANE MATTHEW

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend communities in my riding and across the east coast faced severe storms as Hurricane Matthew left its mark. We saw roads and bridges washed out due to the heavy rainfalls along the Port au Port Peninsula and the highway to Burgeo.

I know in many other communities across Newfoundland, like Gander, St. Albans, and Lewisporte, families are feeling the effects, but we have also seen how Newfoundlanders and Labradorians look out for each other. We check on our neighbours and take in those in need. We have seen folks fill up boats to deliver supplies to communities that have been totally cut off due to the storm.

I want to thank everyone who has lent a helping hand to their neighbours and all the crews who have been working tirelessly to ensure the roads can be reopened and food and supplies make it to every community. I also thank all of my provincial and municipal colleagues for their great work organizing the response on the ground.

Last, I want constituents to know that through the federal government's disaster financial assistance program, their Government of Canada will be there to help our province and all Atlantic provinces rebuild and move forward.

* * *

MORTGAGE INDUSTRY

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, the finance minister took another stab at addressing housing affordability and related mortgage insurance risk to Canadian taxpayers. Again, the finance minister is imposing a one-size-fits-all response on Canadian consumers and the mortgage industry while missing the target.

Statements by Members

I am concerned for young families that will bear the brunt of the Liberal carbon tax and may now have a harder time achieving their dream of home ownership. I am also concerned about the effect of the minister's announcements on competition in the mortgage business. I am disappointed that this important policy change was imposed on consumers and the mortgage industry with no consultation or notice.

The finance minister is the one who has an out-of-control borrowing problem. TD Bank now estimates the deficit is going to be another \$5 billion more than budgeted. The minister thinks that low interest rates are dangerous for Canadian consumers, but a perfect justification for an out-of-control deficit. Nobody needs a lecture from the finance minister on the risks of excessive debt.

* * *

• (1410)

HURRICANE MATTHEW

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as many in this House know, Newfoundland and Labrador is a fine province, renowned for its bilingual jurists. I just thought I would point that out. Unfortunately, it is also renowned for its weather and was recently hit, and hit hard, by heavy rains and high winds.

My riding was spared, but communities like St. Alban's, Morrisville, and Burgeo were not so lucky. Heavy flooding damaged homes and infrastructure. Flash flooding destroyed highways and cut access to communities. Just this morning, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame is helping out some people with their flooded basements.

First responders are working around the clock. Homes and businesses, like the Clode Sound Motel in Charlottetown, Newfoundland, opened their doors to passersby, and musicians, like Jennifer Mitchell and her father Gary, played traditional music on the side of the road to keep people's spirits up.

[*Translation*]

We are also thinking about our Nova Scotia neighbours, particularly our friends in Cape Breton, who were hard hit by the storm. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who were affected.

* * *

[*English*]**HURRICANE MATTHEW**

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Monday, the province of Nova Scotia was hammered by the remnants of Hurricane Matthew. Parts of Cape Breton Island received over 240 millimetres of rain, in an eight-hour period, driven by 120-kilometre-per-hour winds. The result was widespread flooding, washouts, road closures, and extensive power outages.

My colleague, the member for Sydney—Victoria, and I welcomed the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness on Friday past to tour some of the hardest-hit sites. We were joined by provincial Minister of Transportation Geoff MacLellan and area MLAs.

To see the loss and destruction first hand, to speak with the people whose lives have been devastated by this event, was moving, to say the least.

We applaud the hundreds of first responders and the armies of families, friends, and neighbours who helped out. They should know that their actions were noble and appreciated. Together we can share the burden and the work of rebuilding our communities.

Premier Stephen McNeil has pledged to make assistance quick, efficient, and unencumbered.

The people of Nova Scotia must know that this government will be there as a willing partner to help our people through this terrible ordeal.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after proposing to shut out Atlantic Canada from the Supreme Court for the first time ever, it is good to see that the Liberals have reversed their position, listened to Conservatives, and appointed an Atlantic Canadian. While today's Supreme Court appointment fills an important court vacancy, there remain dozens of vacancies across Canada.

As a result of the Minister of Justice's inaction, serious criminal cases are being thrown out of court, including, most recently, a first-degree murder case in Alberta. For months the minister has been talking about filling traditional vacancies, all the while leaving 60 seats vacant.

Before the next serious criminal case is thrown out of court, it is time for the minister to fill these vacancies and to do so immediately.

* * *

JIM PRENTICE

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in this House with a heavy heart.

Last week, Albertans and Canadians lost one of our most devoted public servants. The hon. Jim Prentice served with honour and conviction as a member of this House, as a member of the federal cabinet, and as premier of Alberta.

As a cabinet minister, Mr. Prentice was instrumental in establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As an MP, he showed great courage and compassion by standing as a supporter of marriage equality when it was not easy to do so.

[*Translation*]

He learned French and he also required his staff on the Hill to speak French.

[*English*]

As premier, he was a tireless advocate for the environment and the economy.

Oral Questions

On behalf of my Alberta caucus colleagues and of all caucus colleagues from coast to coast to coast, I send our thoughts and prayers to Jim's devoted wife, Karen, and their family. I thank them for sharing their husband, father, and grandfather with us.

Jim will be sorely missed.

* * *

● (1415)

JIM PRENTICE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I stand in this chamber today to express, on behalf of all New Democrats, our deep sorrow after learning of the tragic loss of our former colleague and friend, Jim Prentice.

Jim was an exemplary member of Parliament. He was thorough and highly competent in his preparation and measured and articulate in debate. His true strength was working with all members of the House.

I had the opportunity to experience first hand his professionalism. We all know in the House that his sincerity and conviction were beyond reproach. He carried himself with a dignity and honour that all hon. members would do well to emulate.

I want to offer our deep condolences to Jim's family and friends, particularly his wife, Karen, and daughters Christina, Cassia, and Kate. We thank them for sharing him with us. Canada is a better place for his service with us.

* * *

JIM PRENTICE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the tragic passing of the man who was a friend to our entire caucus and a close member of our Conservative family for a very long time, Jim Prentice. I know all of us here have Jim's family in our thoughts. Our hearts go out to his wife, Karen, and his children and grandchildren in the wake of their terrible loss.

Jim served his constituents in Calgary Centre North for over six years with devotion. His genuine blue collar upbringing clearly served him well as the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs, for industry, and for the environment.

He was a true gentleman politician: kind and possessing a love of public policy and public service. That was true whether he was in opposition or on the government benches in the House or, of course, working for the people of Alberta as the province's 16th premier. So his loss is Alberta's loss, but it is also Canada's loss.

We hope his loved ones find strength in each other even in their grief and that Jim's memory will be a blessing to them in time.

* * *

AHMADIYYA MUSLIM LEADER

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the global spiritual leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community arrived in Ottawa for a formal visit to Parliament Hill. During his time with us, he will meet with cabinet ministers,

senators, members of Parliament, and the Prime Minister in an effort to further underscore his peaceful message of love for all and hatred for none.

This work is part of an ongoing effort undertaken by his holiness to showcase the peaceful nature and beauty of the faith at a time when we are celebrating Islamic History Month and while calling on global powers to advance an agenda of peace, religious freedom, and the advancement of human rights in Canada and around the world.

I applaud his holiness and members of the global Ahmadiyya faith for their work, and I extend a hand of friendship on behalf of my constituents and the people of Canada.

* * *

JIM PRENTICE

The Speaker: There have been discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, and I understand there is agreement that we now rise and observe a moment of silence in honour of the man who was a friend to many of us and fondly remembered, and by the way, he was an outstanding hockey player as well, the hon. Jim Prentice.

[A moment of silence observed]

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

FINANCE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was elected on a promise to only borrow \$10 billion. He broke that promise and instead borrowed three times more, \$30 billion. Now we learn that the Prime Minister is borrowing \$46.5 billion. First it was \$10 billion, then it was \$30 billion, now it is almost \$50 billion.

When the Prime Minister misses his financial targets that many times in one year, how can Canadians trust him with their money?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect us to make the investments necessary to create growth in this economy.

I would very much like to take this initial moment to add my respects for a former colleague and dear friend, Jim Prentice. Every side of the House feels his loss today, and we will all miss his intelligence, honesty, and thoughtfulness and the kindness he brought to his work. Jim was a man of deep convictions who dedicated his life to public service, to the people of Alberta, and to all Canadians. I cherish the time I spent working with Jim and will always remember his kind, thoughtful manner.

Our hearts go out to Karen and his family. While we know the void can never be filled, we hope that they are comforted by all the amazing stories and memories so many have shared over the past few days about Jim.

Oral Questions

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): I appreciate the Prime Minister's sentiments, Mr. Speaker, but back to my question.

The Prime Minister defended his uncontrolled spending by telling us that it will create jobs and grow the economy, but the evidence is clear: it is not. The economy is not growing, and regular families across the country are losing income and they are losing jobs. It is a failed approach. It is not working. Borrowing more and more money is actually not creating jobs.

Will the Prime Minister stop his reckless spending and start focusing on jobs?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): I find it humorous, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite are talking about a failed approach, because for 10 years their approach of lowering taxes on the wealthiest Canadians gave us the worst growth rate since R.B. Bennett in the depths of the Great Depression.

One of the very first things we did was lower taxes on the middle class and raise them on the wealthiest 1%, and the Conservatives voted against that.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that when they borrow money it has to be paid back, but the Prime Minister's plan is to pay it back with higher taxes. The Prime Minister has already hiked taxes on small businesses. He has cancelled the tax credit for regular families for things like music lessons and hockey practice. Coming next is a payroll tax hike and a national carbon fuel tax hike. The Prime Minister is now considering a tax on watching Netflix.

I know that the Prime Minister is a Liberal, but is there a single tax that he does not like?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Actually, Mr. Speaker, instead of sending child benefits to millionaire families, like the Conservatives wanted to do, we chose to give a more generous tax-free benefit every month that lands in the bank accounts of the nine out of ten Canadian families who need it. This is the kind of thing that helps the people who need it by doing less for the people who do not. The Conservatives never quite understood that, and that is possibly why they are in opposition today.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we gave 10 out of 10 families money, so it is interesting to hear that it is better to give nine out of ten families money. Only a Liberal would say something like that.

This morning, many of my colleagues and I gathered to announce the creation of a strategic softwood lumber task force. This is a very important issue. Why did we have to create this task force? Because the government has not signed a deal. We think it is very important for the government to do so.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to work to maintain the 400,000 jobs that depend on this industry and will he promise forestry workers that an agreement will be reached? It is all well and good to create other jobs, but we want to keep the ones we already have.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just showed, once again, that he does not understand that giving benefits to Canada's wealthiest families does not promote economic growth. That is not what Canadians want. The Conservatives chose to give cheques to millionaires instead of doing what we are doing and that is giving bigger cheques to nine out of ten families, families who really need it.

The opposition party still does not understand that it is by helping the middle class that we create prosperity that is shared by everyone in the country.

• (1425)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question was about 400,000 forestry workers. I do not know if they are millionaires, as the Prime Minister just said, but I do know they are very worried about their jobs.

The Liberals wanted to be in power, and now they are. The previous Liberal government sat on this issue for 10 years, and in 2006, we dealt with it. It took us four months. We ushered in 10 years of stability and predictability for forestry workers. Now it is their turn.

Will the Liberals take care of this matter for all these Canadian jobs?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about what is happening to forestry workers across the country. That is why we are working so hard to resolve the softwood lumber issue.

The fact is that we inherited a broken Canada-U.S. relationship from the former Conservative government. We had so many bridges to build, and that is why we are working very hard to resolve an issue that is of tremendous importance to so many Canadian families, communities, and regions.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, Liberals promised an immediate commitment for home care, but 363 days later, Canadians have seen absolutely nothing, not a cent. The government seems to be using this old commitment to distract from the fact that the Liberals are adopting Stephen Harper's cuts to the health care escalator.

Promises are not negotiating chips; they are promises. Why has the government abandoned true negotiations with the provinces and why has the Prime Minister adopted the Stephen Harper approach to health care?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Actually, Mr. Speaker, the Stephen Harper approach to health care consisted of writing a cheque and then not checking to see whether it was actually spent on health care. Canadians expect that new money invested by the federal government into health care be actually spent on health care.

On top of that, we have made commitments to work with the provinces to invest in home care, because Canadians know that what we need is a system that cares for the sick and elderly, and that demonstrates the kind of collaboration within provinces and with the federal government that did not happen for far too long.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how do we take care of the sick and elderly when the Liberals are cutting \$5 billion a year from the health care escalator by 2020, just like Stephen Harper? Same old, same old.

The Prime Minister will not even sit down with the premiers. He is adopting Stephen Harper's rather insulting approach to provinces. So much for real change.

The premiers have made a good faith proposal to give time to get Canadians out of this immediate health care crisis. We need a simple answer. Will the Prime Minister delay the Harper cuts for a year, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward to investing \$21.5 billion in health care over the next five years, of new money. The only expectation we have is the expectation that Canadians have: that this money be actually spent on health care. That is what the previous government missed out on when it was investing in health care.

We know that health care money must flow to health care. That is what Canadians expect. That is what the provinces expect as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberals promised immediate assistance for home care. One year into their term, there is not a penny for home care in the budget. If they think they can use that promise to make the provinces forget they are going along with Stephen Harper's health care cuts, they are off to a bad start.

Will the Prime Minister scrap Stephen Harper's approach and commit to negotiating with the provinces?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that the federal government is not responsible for health care spending. We have to work with the provinces, which is something the former government did not do. That is why we are very happy to sit down with the provinces and talk about how we can work together to meet Canadians' needs while respecting provincial jurisdiction, of course.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has a duty to pay at least 25% of health care costs.

During the last election campaign, the Prime Minister promised collaborative federal leadership on health care funding. However, he still refuses to sit down with his provincial counterparts to talk about it. Refusing to sit down with the premiers is not real change; that was Stephen Harper's MO.

The Prime Minister must take the time to listen to the provinces. Will he show some good faith and postpone the health care cuts planned for next year?

● (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, respecting the provinces means letting the health ministers get on with their work together.

That is why the Minister of Health is meeting with her provincial counterparts today to talk about how we can work together to meet our commitments to Canadians when it comes to health care, while respecting provincial areas of jurisdiction.

That is leadership, something that has been missing from this House for the past 10 years when it comes to health. That is exactly what Canadians expect. That is what they voted for, and that is what we are working hard to achieve.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us discuss the economy and public finances.

One year ago, the Liberal Party came to power promising a modest deficit of just \$10 billion. Six months ago, it voted in favour of a budget that will create a confirmed deficit of \$30 billion.

Last week, TD Bank reported that the deficit could reach \$34 billion, if not more. That is completely irresponsible. Running a deficit means making our grandchildren pay for today's poor management.

Can the Prime Minister, who is a whiz with numbers as everyone knows, rise and tell us with a straight face what we are headed for?

How much of a deficit will his government run up?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, who will be joining the Standing Committee on Finance.

As he is beginning his term on the committee, I would like to remind him of the promises this government has made about investing in the middle class and families.

The first thing we did was cut taxes for the middle class. Next, we invested in families. Now, we are going to expand the Canada pension plan.

I just returned from the meeting of APEC finance ministers, which was held in Peru last week, and I can say that Canada's plans are being applauded by all APEC member countries. We are headed in the right direction and will continue down that road.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's fine words, but I would have liked an answer from the Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

We understand why the Prime Minister does not answer questions about the deficit. Just two years ago, he said that the budget would balance itself. With that sort of economic theory, it is no wonder we are going into debt.

With regard to the \$30-billion deficit, TD Bank said last week that the deficit could be as high as \$34 billion and that, if nothing is done, we could end up with a cumulative deficit of \$100 billion.

Can the \$100-billion-deficit man rise and finally give us an update on Canada's public finances?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has already answered the question posed by my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent.

I will repeat what I just said because it seems as though my colleague, who is going to join the Standing Committee on Finance, needs to be reminded of what we have already accomplished for Canada's middle class. We cut taxes, we will continue to help families, and we have an historic infrastructure investment plan.

I was at last week's meeting of the APEC finance ministers and all countries there saw Canada as a leader. We are a leader when it comes to investing in the middle class and infrastructure. We are going to continue in that direction. That is the way to grow the economy.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are so out of touch with hard-working Canadians. The federally imposed carbon tax is just another example. Families, farmers, energy workers, charities, and small businesses in Alberta have already been devastated by unprecedented job losses. Imposing a cash-grabbing tax on everything will only make things more difficult for all Canadians, especially for hard-hit Albertans at the very worst time. Albertans want to know why the Liberals are destroying Alberta's economy by kicking us while we are down.

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, we are focused on supporting middle-class Canadians and their families at every stage of their lives. Not only did the Conservatives vote against the Paris agreement on climate change, but when it comes to middle-class Canadians they opposed our government-reducing taxes on nine million Canadians, our Canada child benefit, which helps nine out of 10 Canadian families and will lift 300,000 Canadian children out of poverty, and enhancements to student loans, which will help 250,000 Canadians.

Our government is focused on both protecting our environment and growing our economy while helping the middle class and those working hard to join it.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of Albertans are out of work. People are losing their homes. Food banks and charities are bracing for the damage of a made-in-Ottawa carbon tax. Last week, one family feedlot told me it

would add half a million dollars in annual costs, risking their livelihoods. The Elk Island public school board said a carbon tax will add \$400,000 in fuel costs every year.

Why are the Liberals taking more away and making everything more expensive when people are already struggling to make ends meet?

• (1435)

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 80% of Canadians already live in a province where there is an effective price on carbon pollution, but more action is needed. It is important to have a price on carbon pollution across the country.

We have listened to provinces and territories, including the Government of Alberta. Every province and territory has the flexibility to decide how they implement a price on carbon pollution, either a direct price or through a cap-and-trade system. Provinces and territories can use the revenues as they see fit, including by reducing taxes, if that is what they so choose to do.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's new carbon tax will raise the price of things like food, heat, and gasoline by \$4,000 for the average middle-class family.

The Prime Minister says, "Do not worry, all the money will go to provincial politicians", like Kathleen Wynne for her part as she plans to spend every nickel of it. The tax is not revenue neutral.

If this is really about climate change and not a money grab, why has the Prime Minister not mandated provincial politicians to give back every single cent through lower income taxes?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it might be worthwhile mentioning that it was the Conservatives, in their 2008 platform and Speech from the Throne, who committed to implementing a price on carbon pollution through a cap-and-trade system.

Their "Turning the Corner" plan committed the Conservative government to:

Forcing industry to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions;

Setting up a carbon emissions trading market....

Establishing a market price for carbon.

What the Conservatives are saying today is different from what they told us in 2008.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has broken his promise to the middle class.

Oral Questions

A worker earning \$45,000 a year got exactly zero from the Liberal government's middle-class tax changes, yet that same worker will now pay an extra \$1,000 in carbon taxes, federally mandated carbon taxes, that will go to Kathleen Wynne so that she can fund her so-called green energy insiders.

What happened to social justice? Why are the Liberals taxing the working poor to give to the undeserved rich?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are clear, and they were clear in the election. They want us to protect the environment and simultaneously grow the economy.

This government has been working hard to grow the economy, focusing on areas such as clean tech, which will be the future of the Canadian economy in the next 30 to 40 years, and we have developed a strong and robust climate plan that will allow us to ensure that we meet our targets under the Paris agreement.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage is starting to feel the heat. Last month, I reminded her that she still had some appointments to announce at the CRTC and CBC without further delay.

As CBC reported on the weekend, there is a backlog, CRTC hearings are being delayed, and creators are justifiably concerned. As we know, the minister is busy holding private consultations by invitation only. However, I would remind the House that this is an immediate and serious crisis.

Why go without such expertise?

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

We are fully committed to implementing a new appointment system that is rigorous, transparent, and open. This would apply to all government appointments, naturally.

I invite my colleague to take part in the process and to see which appointments appear on the website. It is important for us to review this process and to have very good appointments.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the government does not fulfill its responsibility to fill vital appointments, it has a tangible and direct effect on Canadians.

Earlier this month a first-degree murder charge was thrown out in Edmonton due to unreasonable delays. The national judicial vacancy rate has more than tripled since the government took office. Judicial vacancies cause the entire justice system to slow down.

When will the Liberal government take the appointments process seriously and fill these vacancies?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and certainly am very mindful of the realities across this country with respect to judicial vacancies.

Our government is committed to a fair, relevant, and accessible justice system. I am further committed to working with the provinces and the territories in a collaborative way to ensure that the many factors that lead to judicial delays are addressed, including the appointment of judges. I very much look forward to announcing, in the near future, the appointments of more judges to our superior courts.

* * *

● (1440)

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister likes to brag about his great relationship with President Obama. However, a relationship is more than gala dinners and photo ops at the White House. It is about getting things done for Canadians.

Prime Minister Harper was able to negotiate agreements on softwood lumber not once but twice, with two different presidents. If the Liberals' relationship with Washington is so great, why will the Prime Minister not pick up the phone, call the president, and get a deal done?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member opposite in the House that the previous agreement expired under the previous government's watch.

We will continue negotiations as we work to meet the mandate agreed to by President Barack Obama and our Prime Minister in June. We will continue to work closely with lumber producers, workers, the provinces, and territories. Any agreement must reflect the realities of our softwood lumber sector, including differences in communities across Canada. We are seeking a good deal for Canada, not just any deal.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read somewhere recently that the Minister of Trade speaks five languages. Apparently trade is not one of them.

From forest to mill, almost 400,000 high-quality, well-paying forestry jobs are now at risk because of the minister's inaction on the softwood lumber file. In one of my communities alone, two mills are at risk. That is 400 jobs and a quarter of the municipal tax base.

How does the Minister of Trade expect people to continue to work and live in the communities they call home when there are no jobs to put food on the table for their families?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House, again, that the softwood lumber agreement expired under the previous government's watch.

I also want to say that our government has delivered for Canadians on trade time after time. In December, we eliminated discriminatory COOL legislation in the U.S. Then we secured expanded access to Mexico and China for beef, and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I want to hear the answer to the question. The hon. Minister of International Trade has just a few seconds left, unless she is done.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: And we got the deal done for canola, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know well that the softwood lumber file has never been a priority for the Liberal government. It was not in its budget, it was not in the throne speech, and it is not in the minister's mandate letter. We have never had a government whose deadlines have been disregarded, even the 100-day self-imposed one last spring.

They have removed the stability and predictability that is vital to our forest industry jobs and the communities those people live in. Would the minister at least get on the phone and secure a standstill of American litigation while negotiations are ongoing?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous government did nothing to secure a softwood lumber agreement, and the agreement expired under its watch.

I was shocked to learn that they did not even begin to negotiate. The member for Lac-Saint-Jean himself confirmed that this morning in a press conference. He said that Conservatives had started discussions, not negotiations.

We are not just chatting with the Americans. We are negotiating intensively. We are looking for a good deal, not just any deal.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, *Pulp Fiction* was a cult film that became the title of Liberal softwood policy.

They continue to blame everyone but themselves for their failure in getting a new softwood lumber deal across the finish line. Now, almost 400,000 workers and whole communities in the forestry sector are hostage to an impending Liberal trade war with the U.S.

When will the trade minister stop treating these jobs as an afterthought and solve this dispute before livelihoods become Liberal collateral damage?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working extremely hard on getting a great deal for Canada. I want to quote some other people who see how hard we are working. I will start with the member for Cariboo—Prince George. He told the committee this summer, “I can appreciate that there's been a considerable amount of work to this point done by both Global Affairs and the minister”.

Christy Clark said something very similar, and I quote: “I've got to give her credit, she's worked day and night to try and resolve this... It's been her central focus for the last several months.”

I am still working hard.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, after NDP pressure, the previous Conservative government blocked the foreign takeover of Canadian satellite maker MDA. The sale was rejected to stop U.S. control of sensitive technology and information, but now the company has shifted to the U.S. control, under the Liberals' noses, without their making a difference right now.

Just last week, the minister was actually musing about further weakening Canada's foreign takeover laws. Will the minister investigate to ensure that Canadian laws are being enforced, and will the Liberals close loopholes that threaten Canadian companies and investment by Canadians?

● (1445)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government, first and foremost, is very committed to the space sector. The member talked about MDA. This is an organization that I visited, and we have made investments with respect to that organization as well.

With respect to MDA and its corporate structure, as the member opposite knows, corporate reorganizations are not subject to the net benefit provisions under the Investment Canada Act. Investment is subject to net benefit review only when a non-Canadian acquires control of a Canadian business in a manner that is set out in the act.

We are monitoring the situation closely, and I can say for the member opposite that we take foreign investments very seriously.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, an American tugboat and tanker barge ran aground on B.C.'s north coast. The accident caused 200,000 litres of diesel to spill into a sensitive area. If this had been a fully loaded supertanker, it would have caused massive devastation to our fisheries, first nations communities, and our marine environment.

When will the Liberals make good on their promise to protect our coasts and implement a permanent ban on crude oil tankers off B.C.'s north coast?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, improving marine safety is a very high priority for this government. That is why I am working with my colleague from Fisheries and Oceans to improve marine safety for this country, as well as working on a moratorium. We will have things to say shortly.

In the meantime, I should let the member know that the Pacific Pilotage Authority has revoked the exemption for piloting for the company in question, the TSB is on location, I have appointed a ministerial observer, and we at Transport Canada will be conducting a compliance inspection.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was an honour for me recently to join the Prime Minister, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the NDP, and many of our colleagues, at the site dedication ceremony for the national Holocaust monument in Ottawa.

[Translation]

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage update us on the progress of this project and indicate how important building such a monument is to the government?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Mount Royal for his important question.

I am proud of our government's commitment to the National Holocaust Monument.

[English]

It will serve as a vital and sobering reminder to all Canadians of the tragedy of the Holocaust. It will honour those six million Jews and millions of others, including Roma, homosexuals, and disabled people, who lost their lives. We must never forget the horrors of the Holocaust, and we must continue to fight the hatred and disregard of humankind.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is about to vote at the UN for members of the sardonically named Human Rights Council. Four notorious human rights abusers are among the candidates, again: China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Cuba.

The vote is secret, but we know favours are traded in the UN process, and we recognize the Liberals' indecent appetite for Security Council votes. Will the Liberals tell Canadians and the world how Canada will vote on these four human rights abusers?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada would like to tell the world that we absolutely intend to lead the resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran at the UN General Assembly's 71st session. We believe that engagement allows us to more effectively hold Iran to account, and I know that is one of Canadians' concerns.

Engagement is a harder path than the previous Conservative government ever chose to take. Isolation is not the way to go. We believe that we are advancing Canadian interests and the interests of our allies by engaging with them more.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have learned that the mayor of Montreal travelled to Iran to meet with the mayor of Tehran, a key player in that country's terrorist-sponsoring and human-rights abusing regime. Denis Coderre signed a co-operation agreement with Mohammad Qalibaf, a senior figure in Iran's revolutionary guard, which directs the brutal theocracy's horrific domestic and foreign agenda.

Was the minister aware of his former Liberal colleague's ill-advised misadventure? Or, is this part of the Liberal government's misguided quest to normalize relations?

• (1450)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): First of all, Mr. Speaker, Mayor Coderre is the best person to answer as to his own travel.

Speaking on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and our government, we are committed to a step-by-step re-engagement with Iran. We believe that an absence of diplomatic representation hurts our interests. A presence advances our interests, particularly with regard to consular matters. We know that engagement is a tougher path, but it is a necessary one to deal effectively with Middle East security issues and to hold Iran to account on human rights.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Engagement is appeasement, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, the foreign affairs minister put his hypocrisy on display to the entire world. He took to Twitter to call on the international community to uphold its responsibility to protect civilians from the mass atrocities of ISIS. Canada was a leader in doing precisely that. Our CF-18s took out nearly 400 fighting positions in Iraq and Syria.

If the minister truly believes in the responsibility to protect civilians, why did he pull out our CF-18s? Does he naively believe that his tweets are more effective than Canada's fighter jets?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am actually very proud of the work that our Canadian Armed Forces have done overseas. As we know, the Iraqi security forces have launched their operation on Mosul. As the Prime Minister announced back in February, Canada continues to support the coalition partners. We have expanded our training advise-and-assist mission, we expanded our intelligence, and we established a role 2 hospital. These are among just a few.

This is why we have actually taken so many cities. We have helped the Iraqi security forces take these steps. If we had not done this, the coalition would not have been as effective.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday through Twitter, the Minister of Foreign Affairs invited the UN and the international community to protect Syrians from atrocities. What has the government done to protect Syrians? Absolutely nothing. Worse yet, by withdrawing our CF-18s, which were striking the Islamic State in the region, the Liberals put civilian lives in danger.

If the Liberals were consistent, they would send the CF-18s back to fight in Iraq.

What has this government done to protect Syrians?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the protection of civilians is extremely important for our government, especially the operation that we are conducting in Iraq. By actually increasing the right type of intelligence, doubling intelligence for the coalition, and tripling the intelligence, we have been able to make the Iraqi security forces more effective on the ground, and that is where the protection of civilians actually happens.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have not yet managed to sign a new softwood lumber agreement, and now the deadline has passed. This summer, the government hinted that an agreement was in sight, but the fact is that our forestry industry will be suffering because of more U.S. tariffs.

The minister refused to give any guarantees to workers who want to know what the government is going to do to protect their jobs.

Can the minister tell us today if her government has a plan B to support the industry before a trade war erupts?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement expired under the previous government. We are working closely with producers, workers, the provinces, and the territories, and we will continue to work with them.

Canada is prepared for every eventuality. We have a plan B, and our government will vigorously defend the interests of Canadian workers and producers. We are working toward not just any agreement, but a good agreement for Canada.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope that includes loan guarantees for the softwood lumber industry.

Canadians were promised transparency, yet this trade minister is still being evasive about the ongoing negotiations of CETA. Wallonia's vote against CETA highlights the many ongoing concerns, including threats to local sovereignty from investor-state provisions. Now the Prime Minister is questioning the relevance of

Europe, when in fact many Canadians share similar concerns about this trade deal.

The minister is so focused on the concerns of Europeans, but when will she focus on Canadians' concerns and fix this deal once and for all?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CETA is one of my top priorities, and I continue to be engaged actively with Canadian partners and with our European partners constantly on this issue. I want to say to the hon. member opposite that I am surprised to hear from the NDP, a party that likes to talk about how it cares about the interests of Quebec, questions about this deal, which are so essential for all of Canada, but particularly for Quebec in terms of bringing us closer to francophone Europe.

* * *

● (1455)

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, serious criminal cases have been thrown out of court as a result of the failure of the Minister of Justice to fill judicial vacancies. Now, in Alberta, a case involving the most serious offence, a first degree murder, was thrown out of court.

How many more cases is the Minister of Justice prepared to see thrown out of court before she does her job and starts appointing judges?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being able to stand up and speak to the work that our government is doing with respect to ensuring a fair, relevant, and accessible criminal justice system.

We are working extremely hard. I am working with my counterparts in the provinces and territories to address the relevant factors that lead to delays, including the appointment of judges.

I was very fortunate to have appointed 15 judges back in June, and I am looking forward to making an announcement very soon with respect to additional superior court judges.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government should be ashamed of its approach to first nations transparency. Three hundred band members from the Samson Cree Nation are now calling for a forensic audit into how their chief and council spent federal funds. They know there was money that was supposed to be going into programs, such as suicide and gang violence prevention, but they see very little change on the ground.

When will the government respond to their plea for a forensic audit and also start to enforce the First Nations Financial Transparency Act?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, accountability and transparency are key tenets for all first nations as well as for this government, and we are ensuring the delivery of the historic investments in indigenous and northern communities through budget 2016.

We are engaging with first nations on the way forward on transparency and accountability. As the member well knows, any member of any first nation can ask our government to provide the audited financial statements at any time. I welcome that request.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the story continues.

Band members of the Alexander and the Onion Lake first nations are calling for financial transparency. In Alexander, an investigation identified \$2.1 million in unexplained payments. In Onion Lake, they have not even provided basic information.

With the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, band members for the first time ever have access to basic information that all Canadians deserve. When will the Liberals enforce the First Nations Financial Transparency Act?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, top-down solutions do not work, and in the Kelowna accord the call for a first nations' auditor general was immediately torn up by the previous government.

We are taking very seriously any allegations of misuse of public funds and, when necessary, we do conduct forensic audits to ensure that the funds were used properly. The audit was commissioned by the Alexander First Nation and therefore we cannot comment on it, but we are reviewing the situation in order to determine whether or not a forensic audit will be required.

* * *

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to host meetings this past week with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and local stakeholders in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. I am equally proud of our government as it makes historic investments in post-secondary education.

Northern Ontario is a large land mass and has communities of all shapes and sizes scattered throughout. We face a unique challenge in promoting economic development. Can the minister responsible for promoting regional economic development share with us his plans for northern Ontario?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his question. It really is an honour and privilege to work with him and other colleagues from northern Ontario.

Our government is doing its part, and we are promoting economic development. Just last week, we invested \$9 million in Confederation College, \$5 million in Sault College, \$5.1 million in the Shingwauk Education Trust, \$2.7 million in the Oshki Education Institute, \$2.5 million in Algoma University, and \$1.6 million for

women entrepreneurship, and there are many more investments yet to come.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Official Languages recently learned that the French language test that immigrants have to take to be accepted into Canada is much more expensive than the English test. This situation is completely unacceptable.

The committee asked Citizenship and Immigration Canada to provide a copy of the test, but that request has been ignored.

Can the minister assure us that the French test will cost less than the English test for immigrants? Will he send us—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

We take the challenges facing francophones outside Quebec very seriously. We have already announced the francophone significant benefit program. We will probably add other measures for francophones outside Quebec to help them in many ways.

As for the cost of the test, we are currently looking into the matter.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister was busy posing for photo ops in Montreal and saying that Canada wants to be a world leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS, his government was quietly cutting assistance to HIV/AIDS advocacy organizations. This will have a devastating impact on the sector and directly affect very vulnerable people, particularly in indigenous and LGBT communities.

Will the minister do the right thing and restore funding to those organizations?

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, HIV and hep C are serious but preventable diseases. The funding that the Public Health Agency of Canada provides to community-based organizations across the country to combat HIV and hep C is staying steady at \$26.4 million. There are a number of new organizations that have been invited to submit full proposals. This is part of an open, objective, evidence-based, and transparent process, and decisions were made by the committee of technical experts.

* * *

[Translation]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in September, Canada watched with excitement as our Paralympians made history with their performances in Rio.

Our high-level athletes are among the best in the world, but when they get home they still face accessibility challenges across the country.

[English]

Would the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities share with the House some of her vision and what she hopes to achieve with Canada's accessibility legislation?

[Translation]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Toronto—Danforth for her question.

Our government is determined to ensure better accessibility for Canadians with disabilities and better opportunities in their communities and their workplaces from coast to coast to coast.

[English]

This new law would proactively address barriers to inclusion and shift the conversation on disabilities in this country. This is my vision. However, we want to hear from Canadians. I encourage everyone in the House and every Canadian to participate in the consultations that are ongoing through February 2017.

We are going to make a difference with this law.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they may not want to admit it, but the job situation in Alberta is critical. Here is the real impact of the Liberal tax policy on some Alberta communities: High River minor hockey registration is down 20%; a Calgary dance studio's registration is down 100 kids; and Redwater food bank usage is up 60%.

They took away the child fitness tax credit, they took away the universal child care benefit, and they are replacing them with the job-killing carbon tax. It is only going to make a dire situation much worse.

When is the government going to realize that the tax policy decisions it is making and these schemes are only going to make lives much worse for Canadian families?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, unlike the Conservatives, we are focused on supporting middle-class Canadians and families who are working hard to join the middle class.

Not only did the Conservatives vote against the Paris agreement and the Vancouver declaration, but they also voted against almost everything we have done to improve the lives of Canadians across the country. They voted against reducing taxes for nine million out of 10 million Canadians. They voted against a child benefit that helps nine out of 10 Canadian families and will lift 300,000 Canadian children out of poverty.

Our government is focused on protecting the environment and growing the economy in a responsible way.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, mothers who lose their employment while on parental leave are not entitled to employment insurance. The minister knows it and is doing nothing about it. The government is once again hiding behind another consultation. The solution is simple and everyone knows what it is. It is just a matter of political will.

Will the minister immediately change the regulations, as we suggested she do, so that women in Quebec can stop being punished for becoming mothers?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through budget 2016, the government announced changes to improve employment insurance so that more Canadians could get the help they need when they need it.

Our government is committed to improving EI. This includes making compassionate care benefits more flexible and more inclusive for those who provide care for seriously ill family members and providing more flexibility in parental benefits and leave.

As the hon. member knows, we are involved in consultations with provinces, territories, and other stakeholders, in the coming weeks in order to modernize employment insurance.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, France's prime minister, Manuel Valls, was telling it like it is when he said, "The full veil is essentially a means to undermine women, [and that] goes against...democratic values."

Routine Proceedings

It is about time that our so-called feminist and democratic Prime Minister understand this. If he truly supports gender parity, what is the prime minister waiting for to require women to take the citizenship oath with their faces uncovered?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to represent a government that understands that gender equality is good for all Canadians.

When women have the right to live in communities, thrive in their academic or employment situations, and are supported by communities that understand that we value diversity, that is when our entire country will succeed.

We have a Prime Minister who is a feminist. We have a government that supports gender equality. I am very proud of a country that understands this is good for all of us.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Manuel Valls and the Muslim Canadian Congress both consider so-called religious symbols such as the full veil to be more of a political statement.

The Bloc Québécois believes that religion and politics should be kept separate. After all, the best way to protect religions is for the state not to have one. Furthermore, gender parity is not negotiable and a tenet of our democracy.

Will the Prime Minister listen to reason and require women to vote with their faces uncovered?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the values that define Canada include respect and openness toward our full diversity. Our country's diversity is a source of strength. We as politicians need to focus on bringing people together instead of promoting division.

We are working to create conditions where all Canadians have the best chances to live safe, healthy, and productive lives.

We will respect the diversity of Canadian communities. We will visit with people in ways that are appropriate for their communities, whether they are military communities, religious communities, or indigenous communities.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Holiness Mirza Masroor Ahmad, head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the government response to the second report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, entitled "Study of the Translation Bureau".

[Translation]

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (inflicting torture).

[English]

The committee has studied the bill and while we very much thank the sponsor for his very hard work, we recommend not to proceed further with the bill.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, entitled "Report 4, Drug Benefits—Veterans Affairs Canada, of the Spring 2016 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada".

I would like to take this time to thank the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament personnel. As we know from serving on committees, the clerk, the research analysts, the interpreters, the translators, and other technical support personnel were invaluable in helping us organize and expedite our work on this report. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

[Translation]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 13th report later this day.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-314, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualifying period).

Routine Proceedings

She said: Mr. Speaker, if they lose their jobs, mothers who took maternity or parental leave do not have a sufficient number of hours accumulated upon their return to work to be eligible for employment insurance benefits, and because the Quebec plan is more generous and works so well, more Quebec mothers fail to qualify for employment insurance.

It is shameful that women who lose their jobs are left without a cent simply because they gave birth. This constitutes indirect discrimination against women, and the government has an obligation to take action and intervene. That is why, today, the Bloc Québécois is introducing a bill to put an end to this prejudice.

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

• (1515)

[English]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you were to seek it, I think you would find consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

[Translation]

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 18, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

SENIORS

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to present a petition with respect to seniors.

Today, one in six Canadians is a senior, and in fourteen short years that will be one in four Canadians. The petitioners call upon the House to appoint a minister of seniors and to develop a national

strategy for seniors. It is their hope that such a focus will allow for better treatment of seniors and a better focus on the issues that affect seniors.

JUSTICE

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from members in my constituency of North Okanagan—Shuswap in support of Molly and Cassie's law, private member's Bill C-225. There are a number of names on this petition.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to pass legislation that would recognize preborn children as separate victims when injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers, allowing for two charges to be laid against the offender instead of one.

SHAWNIGAN LAKE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the residents of Shawnigan Lake in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, who petition the federal government to protect Shawnigan Lake from a contaminated soil dump under the Fisheries Act.

I know it is primarily a provincial issue, but the petitioners would like some help from the federal government.

IRAN

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran and an Iran-sponsored terrorist group that has murdered many Canadian citizens and kidnapped, tortured, and murdered foreign diplomats.

Iran has been designated a foreign state supporter of terrorism by Canada. Terror victims and their supporters across Canada seek a commitment from the Government of Canada that Iran will remain listed as a state supporter of terrorism.

The petitioners therefore call upon Canada to maintain the listing of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a state supporter of terrorism pursuant to section 6.1 of the State Immunity Act for as long as the Iranian regime continues to support terrorism.

• (1520)

ARVA FLOUR MILL

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not surprisingly I have approximately 1,000 signatures with respect to the Arva Flour Mill, which is 197 years old.

The petitioners recognize that the flour mill workplace, which has been put into question following a labour code inspection, is important to all Canadians but they also recognize the Arva Flour Mill as an important historical tourism destination. They ask that it be exempt from the Canada Labour Code.

BRITISH HOME CHILDREN

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

Business of Supply

The first petition calls upon Parliament to offer an unequivocal, sincere and public apology to British home children survivors and their descendants. These Canadians were taken as children from their homes in Great Britain over many decades, and served often as indentured servants in Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition that calls upon Parliament to adopt a carbon policy that applies a fee to greenhouse gas emissions at their sources, and urges all nations around the world to adopt a similar carbon policy.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present petitions in support of protecting the rights of pregnant women to safely carry their children to term. In one of many personal letters I received along with these petitions, Alicia Johns states: "Hello, I'm 29 years old and I've given birth to four beautiful boys. Two of them were premature, one over seven weeks and one 10 weeks premature. Both are doing amazingly well. I'm now carrying my fifth son. I'm 28 weeks, six days pregnant, and counting down every day because each day he stays in my womb is important. I know from personal experience that nature can have its own plans and things don't always turn out the way we expect. What happened to Cassie and Molly was not natural, when the life of her and her daughter were brutally taken. When I make a choice to carry my child—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member should know that when presenting petitions, one refers briefly to the content of the petition and then presents it, rather than reading the entirety of it or letters from or relating to it.

The hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition from my constituents. It says that Families For Justice is a group of Canadians, people who have had a loved one killed by an impaired driver. They believe Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient, and they want the crime called what it is, vehicular homicide.

The petitioners call for mandatory sentencing for vehicular homicide and for this Parliament to support Bill C-226, Impaired Driving Act and Bill C-247, Kassandra's law.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present in regard to the Falun Gong, which is a traditional Chinese spiritual discipline consisting of meditation exercises and moral teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to, in a public way, call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China.

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a revised response to Question No. 297, originally tabled on September 19, could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 297—**Mr. Ron Liepert:**

With regard to the Canada Summer Jobs Program for the summer of 2016: (a) how much funding has been approved, broken down by riding; (b) how much funding was requested, broken down by riding; (c) how many program requests were turned down, broken down by riding; (d) how much funding was allocated, broken down by riding?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SOFTWOOD LUMBER AGREEMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Surrey—Newton.

I thank the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster for this important motion. I know the member understands, as does our government, the importance of forestry to the people of his riding and to our country.

The forest industry employs more than 200,000 Canadians and contributes \$22 billion a year to our GDP. In fact, it provides more jobs per dollar than any other resource sector. We export 33 billion dollars' worth of forest products to 180 countries around the world, and we are constantly looking for ways to expand international opportunities.

Government officials continue to meet regularly with their American counterparts trying to reach a new agreement on softwood lumber. Our goal is to negotiate a durable and equitable solution, one that will be fair to softwood producers, downstream industries, and consumers on both sides of the border. These are the good faith efforts of good friends. Both sides want to arrive at a new agreement because both sides understand the importance of forestry to the health of our economies and the protection of our environment.

Business of Supply

For some of us, the forest industry might conjure up images of tarpaper shacks and logging camps, but that image is grossly outdated. Today, forestry is on the leading edge of technology and setting the pace on environmental performance. Its products are strengthening composite car parts, making vehicles lighter, reducing emissions, and replacing plastics made from non-renewable fossil fuels.

Today's forestry worker is as likely to be wearing a white lab coat as a red plaid shirt. She might be a genomics researcher, investigating ways to make trees more resistant to disease, or an economist, working to optimize supply chains. To paraphrase that classic Oldsmobile commercial, this is not your father's forest industry. In fact, the Canadian forest industry has transformed itself into one of the most innovative parts of our economy.

It was not that long ago that forestry seemed to be on the ropes. To many, it seemed like an outdated, even dying industry. Then something remarkable happened. Instead of wringing its hands, the industry rolled up its sleeves and began a transformation whose best chapters are still being written. Forestry leaders reached out to their critics, listened to them, and made changes to their operations. The industry invested in research, developed new products, and established new offshore markets, creating not just a new image but a new vision of what forestry was and could be.

Today, the forest industry is positioned to help address some of the biggest challenges facing our country, such as combatting climate change, driving innovation, creating economic opportunities for indigenous and rural communities, and advancing trade. Let me touch on each of these.

First, on climate change, it would be hard to overstate the importance of the forest sector to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I would even go so far as to say that there can be no global solution to climate change without the forest sector. It is that important. Why is that? It is because forestry is unique. It actually takes carbon out of the air. Most of us will remember enough of our high school science to know that trees suck up vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere, storing it for decades. However, forestry's contribution goes far beyond that. It is developing clean technologies, producing green energy, reducing its need for energy and water, and lowering both emissions and waste. While Canada's overall greenhouse gas emissions were rising between 1990 and 2012, pulp and paper mills were actually reducing their emissions by an impressive 66%, and it is just getting started.

Lignin, a material found in trees, could become the crude oil of the future, with biofuels substituting for fossil fuels in the production of plastics, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals. Then there is wood as a building material. Pound for pound, engineered wood can be as strong as steel, making it safe and practical not only in buildings but also in infrastructure such as bridges.

• (1525)

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the tallest wood building in the world, a new student residence at the University of British Columbia. This magnificent building is not only an engineering and architectural showpiece; it is an environmental game-changer, storing close to 1,600 metric tons of carbon dioxide and saving more than 1,000 metric tons in greenhouse gas

emissions. That is like taking 500 cars off the road for a year with a single building.

Forestry also helps to fight climate change through its sustainable management practices. Third parties have certified these practices as among the world's best. Canada now boasts 40% of the world's certified forests, far more than any other jurisdiction in the world. That matters, because our customers can be confident that wood products bought from Canada were harvested through sustainable practices. Any tree harvested on crown lands in Canada must be replaced, and permanent removal of forests for agriculture or municipal development, for example, is declining. The result is that actual deforestation is less than 0.02% a year. Quite simply, when the world wants to learn about sustainable forestry and best practices, it looks to Canada. Therefore, the forest sector has an essential role to play in combatting climate change.

Second, it is helping to drive innovation. For decades, the forest industry has been developing and investing in new products and new ways of operating. We look at the rise of clean tech and bio-energy, a renewable energy source derived from things like wood, wood waste, and straw. In July, I travelled to Port-Cartier, Quebec, to announce \$44.5 million for the first commercial-scale facility to convert forest residues into a form of renewable fuel oil. This project is a shining example of governments working together to support the industry and advance Canada's bio-economy. An increasing number of remote and indigenous communities are now using bio-energy to end their dependence on high-emission diesel generators for their electricity. The government is working with industry and provinces to develop the forest products of the future through investments in R and D and innovation, and by helping first-in-kind clean innovations reach commercialization.

Third, forestry is a dynamic engine of growth, creating economic opportunity across our country, including in indigenous and remote communities.

Business of Supply

Fourth, and related, forestry creates jobs at home by driving trade abroad. There has been a remarkable rise in the export of wood products to markets such as China, up more than 1,400% over the past 10 years. The U.S. market remains vitally important for Canadian producers of softwood lumber, but continuing to expand into other markets and other types of products is helping to diversify our trade and boost our prosperity. While its reach is global, the forest industry's impact remains local. It is the lifeblood of rural Canada and a major source of income for about one in seven municipalities across the country.

Our government believes in this industry. We have a clear vision of it playing an essential role in some of the most important issues of our times: combatting climate change, driving innovation, and creating economic opportunities for rural and indigenous communities. That is why we are standing by this industry. That is why we are continuing to work hard toward a new agreement on softwood lumber.

• (1530)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for talking about the great importance of the forest industry here in Canada. Certainly in my riding in Alberni Valley, it is the number one employer. I come from a long history of family working in forestry. My great-grandfather, my grandmother's family, and my mother's family all grew up in forestry. Forestry is really the most important employer in Alberni Valley. We have lost a lot of jobs in forestry so we know how important getting this deal done is.

The NDP is urging the Liberal government to secure a new agreement that respects Canada's regional differences and protects Canadian forestry jobs. Tens of thousands of high-quality jobs are at risk, especially in British Columbia.

We want to also ensure that we protect our producers. We want to ensure that there is going to be no tax retroactivity in this agreement. Can the minister assure producers in British Columbia that this will be something the Liberals are going to make sure will be protected?

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his commentary and his question, and would tell him that I also share the importance of this industry to our country. There are regional differences, but again, in a country like Canada we have to expect that there would be.

The most important point we can make is that the Minister of International Trade shares our anxiety about the importance of this deal and the fact that we are not yet at the point where we can say that we have arrived at one, but I know that she is working diligently, not only with her counterpart in the United States but staying in very close touch with the forestry sector right across Canada.

I also know that she has a very good understanding of what those requirements are from each region, and she takes that intelligence and that passion with her when she meets with her counterpart in the United States, which I know is ongoing.

• (1535)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. minister across the way for his in-depth knowledge of the forest industry and the value that it adds to the Canadian economy.

As our hon. colleague previously mentioned, I know what it is like to get up at 2 a.m. to drive 200 kilometres to a logging block to start a cold skidder, to run a chainsaw. The livelihoods of our families have depended on the forest industry, much the same as many of the families in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George.

We have a community within our riding that because of the uncertainty it is facing with no softwood lumber agreement has two mills at risk, 400 jobs, a quarter of the municipal tax base. What message does the hon. minister think I should be giving to those 400 families, as well as the mayors in the municipalities that are going to lose that municipal tax base and those jobs in those communities?

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, the message would be that the Government of Canada understands the importance of jobs in the forestry sector in British Columbia, and that the Minister of International Trade is working diligently in negotiations with the United States to come up with a deal that will be in the interest of both sides of the border.

We understand the reality of trade negotiations. If we are going to come up with an agreement, there has to be two signatories to it. I know that the minister has been working diligently to establish trusting relationships with her counterparts in the United States. She is fully aware of the importance of the sector for all regions of our country. The minister is working diligently to come up with an arrangement that is satisfactory to us and to our counterparts south of the border.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know how important the softwood lumber issue is for Canada.

These disagreements have been ongoing for 30 years with the United States. In 2002, the former Liberal government thought we had an agreement that would last some time. It broke down. In 2006, we were finally able to get a softwood lumber agreement. Ninety-six per cent of our lumber here in Canada is exported to the United States. That is why it is so imperative that we get a deal.

The new Liberal government came in, and there is no mention in the mandate, no discussions of any significance taking place. I guess I will just give the minister another chance. We have natural resources, gas and oil, which are in trouble; softwood lumber, which it seems has had nothing happening in the last year; and our economy, which, even with all the spending the government is doing, is not growing. Nothing seems to be working for the Liberals.

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, the government understands that fully 20% of the GDP of our country is generated in the natural resource sector, including in the forestry sector. We understand that there are very important jobs for the middle class that are generated by investments in the forestry sector.

Business of Supply

I have spent much time, since I have had the pleasure of being the minister responsible for forestry, getting to understand, much better than I did before I assumed the office, the passion with which the sector is working on sustainable development practices. As a matter of fact, I know that it is developing a reputation internationally as a world leader in sustainable development. The elements are in place for the sector to thrive, the deal is important, and the minister is working hard.

● (1540)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise as a member of the international trade committee and a proud British Columbian member of Parliament for Surrey—Newton to address the opposition motion. I am making a point of mentioning my province in my speech because after reading this motion, it is clear that the hon. member and his party have no clue what British Columbians reliant on the softwood lumber industry are saying about the ongoing negotiations with the United States.

I am well aware of the importance of forestry to the Canadian economy, both today and throughout our history as a country. Blessed with some of the most dense and rich forests on earth, Canada moved seamlessly from the fur trade to logging as our dominant industry in the first half of the 19th century, and today, forestry and, more specifically, softwood lumber stand as a significant part of the economic backbone of British Columbia's economy.

The numbers do not lie. The forestry sector contributes \$12 billion to B.C.'s GDP and generates approximately \$2.5 billion in taxes, revenues, and other fees. B.C. exported more than \$5.9 billion worth of softwood lumber globally in 2015. In B.C., there are approximately 145,000 people who are either directly or indirectly employed as a result of this sector, and these are very good-paying jobs. The average skilled employee earns about \$75,000 annually. Whether as a logger, a mill worker, or a forest management analyst, these jobs serve as the lifeblood of communities across British Columbia.

This motion makes mention of a framework, and I can confidently report that these facts, these numbers, these jobs, and the families that rely on them represent a framework that this government is using as its foundation for negotiating a softwood lumber agreement. When I read this motion, it screams of an opposition party that is more concerned with scoring cheap political points than securing a deal that puts the best interests of British Columbians and, indeed, all Canadians first.

The wording of this motion is not only inflammatory, but, I would argue, also intentionally misleading when it comes to the government's actions on this file. It seems that I am not alone in this belief. As an example, I will read a quote from the Premier of British Columbia, the hon. Christy Clark, speaking about the efforts of the Minister of International Trade. She stated, "I've got to give her credit, she's worked day and night to try and resolve this. It's been her central focus for the last several months".

I am very proud to speak about the collective effort that this government has taken to support the minister's tireless efforts. Negotiations are happening with the full involvement of the Government of B.C., B.C.-based industry representatives, and first

nations' community leadership and members. The minister is in frequent and close contact with the premier, as well as the B.C. minister of forests, lands and natural resource operations, Steve Thomson.

Over the past year, Global Affairs Canada officials have travelled across B.C. to hold 27 meetings with a wide range of industry representatives, including the British Columbia Lumber Trade Council, the B.C. Coast Forest Products Association, the Interior Lumber Manufacturers' Association, the Independent Wood Processors Association of British Columbia, the Private Forest Landowners Association, and the Truck Loggers Association, to name a few.

● (1545)

Consultations have also included extensive outreach and involvement with representatives of the BC First Nations Forestry Council, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, the BC Assembly of First Nations, as well as the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council.

I can understand how the hon. member and his party across the way are so confused by this level of engagement and collaboration. It is because he served in a government that never made consultation a part of the way it governed.

For example, I remember how, during the 2011 election campaign, the member and his government promised farmers that they would be able to vote on any planned changes to the Canadian Wheat Board. However, after winning a majority, that promise was broken, with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster stating that the only vote necessary on the proposed legislative updates was the one that happened in the election.

This Liberal government has a far different attitude, as I just described in mentioning the stakeholder outreach that shapes our negotiations for a renewed softwood lumber agreement. It is through these extensive consultations that our government has heard one simple message consistently repeated over and over: Do not make a deal that sells our sector and our country down the river.

In fact, we have heard resolve from stakeholders that the federal government should move to litigation if necessary, because taking a deal at any cost is not an option for the hundreds of thousands of Canadians whose livelihoods depend on a fair, sustainable deal being signed.

The member's motion speaks about the threat to the livelihood of Canadian workers and communities, and yet that same motion is asking for an end to what is referred to as "delaying". Well, what the Conservatives call delaying, we refer to as negotiating and fighting for the best interests of Canada.

Canadians can rest assured that this government is taking a strong and decisive position in our negotiations with the U.S. With the support of stakeholders, the minister and her team are pushing hard for a deal that is not about a quick political announcement for a media headline, but rather one that will look out for the interests of our softwood lumber industry for many decades to come.

Business of Supply

There is no way I can support this motion, which calls on Canada to just throw up its hands and give up in the name of signing a deal at any cost. This government is going to take whatever time necessary to properly defend this country's interests.

To conclude, I want to say that it is a good thing that those members across the way, who are so ready to roll over, are no longer the ones negotiating this agreement. The stakes are too high not to fight, and fight hard, in the name of Canada.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the comments of my hon. colleague for Surrey—Newton almost laughable. As a matter of fact, for the last 10 and a half to 11 months, actually coming up to a year this Wednesday, we have been standing in the House and fighting for the folks in small communities from coast to coast to coast, the small communities such as the ones in my riding where their jobs are dependent on this agreement.

For my hon. colleague to say that we would rather just roll over and accept something is wrong and misleading. We have been challenging the government to fight for Canadian jobs, fight for industry, and to make sure that everyone is at the table, all of the provinces and all of the industry, to make sure that the next agreement is a fair and balanced one.

Does my colleague not understand that this means thousands of jobs in B.C. alone, and that we have been fighting for them?

• (1550)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that the opposition needs to stop political posturing.

My colleagues on the committee from the opposition in fact appreciated the complexity of this file and have recognized the efforts that have been made by our government.

Today's motion is politically motivated. I can tell the hon. member that our government is concerned about every British Columbian and all those 145,000 jobs that are dependent on this, including the workers from Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from across the way for speaking with great passion about the importance of the forestry industry in British Columbia. As fellow British Columbians, we both know how important forestry is to British Columbians. We also both understand that the failure to sign a new agreement is creating enormous pressure on producers, on the employers, on the employees, and on their families in forest communities like mine in Port Alberni, in the Alberni Valley, on Vancouver Island.

I want to make sure that the member understands the sense of urgency to get this deal done, that the producers are under so much pressure to ensure that we have a good agreement, and that there is also going to be no tax retroactivity imposed upon the producers.

I want to hear the hon. member talk about ensuring that there will not be any tax retroactivity and that they are going to stand up for producers so that there is some certainty as they go through this difficult period of volatility or uncertainty. If the member could actually speak to that, it would be greatly appreciated by the people on Vancouver Island and, certainly, by all of those in the forestry sector on Vancouver Island.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from British Columbia, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, for talking about his concern with respect to the jobs in his particular region, and across British Columbia, particularly in regard to free trade.

When negotiating free trade with the U.S., we realize that more than 50% of the softwood lumber trade is with the U.S. As I mentioned earlier, we want to have a deal that is good for British Columbians, that is good for Canada, and not just any deal.

I can assure members that our Prime Minister, the Minister of International Trade, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, and their team are fully committed to face any challenges in future that might arise out of this.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with our hon. colleague from Yellowhead.

Today we are talking about the longest trade dispute with our major trading partner, the U.S. While some would say that this trade dispute has gone on for decades, it could be argued that the softwood lumber dispute has been longer, perhaps a century. It has been one of the longest and most costly trade disputes our country and our major trading partner, the U.S., have had.

The actual term used when we are talking about softwood lumber and the trade dispute is “war”. We talk about a trade war. When an agreement is in place, the term “truce” is what we use. We had a truce and came to some sort of agreement. To date we have had four softwood lumber wars.

I want to bring this back to my riding of Cariboo—Prince George and talk about a community just north of Prince George. There is a little town in northern British Columbia called Mackenzie. This town has weathered many storms and should have gone under many times. In 2007, the town's six mills shut down one by one. Fifteen hundred of the five thousand jobs that were available in the town were lost.

Mackenzie is over 100 kilometres from the nearest major centre. Since the devastating job losses in 2007, new forestry operations have once again begun to pop up, and while the job numbers have not returned to pre-2007 numbers, forestry investment has slowly come in over the years thanks to private investment and a secure softwood lumber agreement that our Conservative government secured in 2006.

I use the town of Mackenzie as an example, because when an industry is faced with uncertainty, jobs leave. This leaves residents with nowhere to turn. When jobs go, so do schools and small businesses, and so does critical infrastructure.

Over the course of the last 11 months, we have seen a lot of inaction on this file. I go as far as saying that the Liberal government has completely and utterly left forestry families in the dust.

Business of Supply

The Minister of International Trade has come to the House time and again to say that reaching a new deal was a priority for the Liberal government right from the get-go. How much of a priority are the thousands of families who depend on the forestry industry to put food on their tables when in the 219 promises in the Liberals' campaign platform there was not one mention of softwood lumber? There was not one mention of softwood lumber in their platform and not in the Minister of International Trade's mandate letter, either, nor in the Speech from the Throne. As a matter of fact, in one of the very first speeches the Prime Minister gave he said that Canada will become known more for its resourcefulness than its natural resources under his reign. The first time softwood lumber was even mentioned in this Parliament was on this side of the House.

The minister has time and again regurgitated talking points and offered simple platitudes, much the same as what we saw earlier today.

In March, the minister trumpeted a real breakthrough in the softwood lumber talks. She said that the government had the Americans at the table. In an interview, the minister went as far as to reference Canada as the girl next door who has not been noticed, but it was not the case anymore. With the President and the Prime Minister's new relationship, things were great. Things were going to be amazing. As a matter of fact, I think the minister said that the President was giddy about this new relationship, so giddy in fact, that his handlers said they had never seen the President so happy.

Hon. Ed Fast: BFF.

Mr. Todd Doherty BFFs I think was the term that was used, Mr. Speaker. We have heard that over and over again. It was already delivering concrete results. They had a big meeting. They invited everyone to Washington, which included a glamorous state dinner. We have heard lots about that: red carpets, lots of selfies, a glamorous state dinner. Now what we know to be true is that the only table they had the Americans at was the dinner table. That was it.

When I was in aviation and was tasked with a new project, I always started with an outline of what I wanted to achieve, what our goal was. It started with a broad proposal, and as I gained insight and feedback from those around me, which included naysayers and sometimes competition, my proposal became more targeted. I knew specifically what my negotiating position was, and I brought that to the bargaining table.

● (1555)

We can only successfully argue for an outcome when we know what the goal is we are trying to achieve. We cannot negotiate for a new car or home unless we know what we want: the colour or type of car, two doors or four, a hatchback or sedan. Is it going to be a two-storey or do we want a bungalow?

The Liberals had no idea what they wanted this new deal to look like. They did not consult broadly, as much as they are trying to say that they had 50 meetings coast to coast and all of these consultations. The truth of the matter is that they arrogantly figured that they knew best and that nobody was going to tell them what this next new softwood lumber agreement would look like.

In reality, we now have an industry and provinces that are in flux, without consensus, which is why in August, we called for an emergency meeting of the international trade committee. I tabled a motion calling on the government to immediately convene a meeting with all provinces and industry representatives.

Members will remember, because the Liberals keep using the same line, that I commended the great work they were doing. However, the next line, which they are not using, was that I said that this is so important that we need to get the provinces and industry around a table to try to build consensus to try to save the negotiations. However, this was shot down by the member from Quebec, who said that it was a complete waste of time and money. Doing everything we can to protect Canadian jobs is not a waste of time or money.

Leading means making difficult decisions. The previous Conservative government knew this. In 2006, Stephen Harper made the softwood lumber agreement negotiations his number one priority, because jobs were on the line, and within three months, a deal was done. The livelihoods of our rural communities were saved.

If the Liberal government was serious about trade, it would have worked more expeditiously to solve this issue. It would have taken up our offers of assistance and our suggestions. It would have ensured that the Canadian lumber industry was able to continue to support the hundreds of thousands of middle-class families who depend on this vital sector for their livelihoods by securing an agreement.

A failure to renegotiate one of the most important trade agreements between Canada and the United States is simply inexcusable. Unfortunately, but not so surprising after what we have witnessed over the last year, the Liberal government has once again failed to stand up for the hard-working Canadians employed in the natural resource sector.

We know that the softwood lumber agreement expired in its entirety last week. The grace period expired last Wednesday. However, the Liberals have been resigned to litigation rather than negotiation for some time. They told us so in August.

The B.C. Minister of Forests, Steve Thomson, said that any fight would be "very expensive" and complex. He went on to say:

We know it's challenging...a managed trade agreement is preferable to litigation... It's costly for producers, costly for government and also harms U.S. consumers.

Everyone seems to understand that jobs are on the line, except the Minister of International Trade. All she has had to offer is that it is a tough deal to negotiate and is "fiendishly complex".

What is tough is finding ways to put food on the table when the towns are literally built on the backs of forestry jobs. Without a new softwood lumber agreement in place, Canadian forestry operations are faced with the prospect of costly U.S. duties on lumber that will force producers to shut down. Almost 400,000 well-paying, high-quality jobs are now at risk. Small mom and pop operations, which cannot afford to wait out the litigation, will be facing much uncertainty in the coming days.

Business of Supply

I have said before that in one of my communities, 400 jobs are at stake, which is a quarter of the tax base. That may seem like a small number when we compare it to places like Vancouver, where the economy is propped up by other avenues, such as tourism, film, and TV. Rural communities do not have that same luxury. We are dependent on our natural resource industry to fuel our secondary industries, such as real estate, retail, food services, and even tourism. I am not sure that the minister, from Toronto, or the parliamentary secretary, from Montreal, would fully understand this.

I invite the minister and the parliamentary secretary to come to my riding, because they would hear loud and clear from my constituents who are facing uncertain times.

All we heard today were simple, regurgitated platitudes and a minister who is content to have left one of the most important trade files between Canada and the United States on the back burner and who, through her mismanagement, has plunged Canada into softwood lumber trade war number five.

• (1600)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is easier to get a trade deal done when there are WTO and NAFTA rulings, which were undertaken by the previous Liberal government over a period of years, that set the stage for it before one gets into office,

Which statements are true? At one point, the member was accusing us, in question period, of flying the white flag. We clearly did not do that. At another point, he congratulated the minister for her hard work this summer, and rightfully so because of all her hard work.

I am curious to know what the hon. member would have done differently under the circumstances.

• (1605)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals like to use quotes and misrepresent quotes from various places, but the reality is that right after the quote they are referring to, I immediately said that there was not one mention in the mandate letter, not one mention in the Speech from the Throne. That is why we are calling on the committee to immediately convene an emergency round table of industry and the provinces.

What would we have done differently? In three months we managed to get a softwood lumber agreement on the table. Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

It is very clear to us that the government of the day, the Conservative government, was asleep at the switch. Right now, we are in a buffer zone, and we are still grappling with the problem.

We are happy with today's motion. It is clear that the government must be told to step up and protect workers.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about setting up a loan program, a program to support businesses. I do not imagine he

would be in favour of that. What forestry industry workers fear most is an American surtax. Can my colleague comment on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my hon. colleague, the reality is that jobs are on the line. Our government not only negotiated a softwood lumber agreement in 2006, but in 2012, with the very same BFF of the new Prime Minister, we negotiated a two-year grace period, an extension. Our discussions and negotiations brought us to the point where the next government, whatever that was, would be in a great position to finalize that softwood lumber agreement.

I apologize if I missed part two of the member's question, but I do not think adding incentives or grants for the forest industry are going to help, because then the U.S. will use that against us as subsidizing the industry. We need to get the best deal forward and negotiate rather than litigate.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George for making such a compelling, powerful argument in favour of getting a deal with the United States on softwood lumber. The last time we had this kind of chaos within the forestry industry in Canada was under the former Liberal government of Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien. It was chaotic. It was a war in the woods, as it was called. It took a Conservative government to resolve it.

More recently, we have a Liberal government that claims that it had a framework agreement with the United States outlined, but nothing was delivered.

Would my colleague spell out what he has seen from the Liberal government to respond to the promise it made that there would be a clear framework to get this resolved within 90 days of the meeting between President Obama and prime minister Harper last March?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, the minister stood in the House and said that they had a real breakthrough. She trumpeted the fact that because of this new relationship, they were going to get a deal done. As a matter of fact, I believe they said that in 100 days, because they gave themselves a 10-day cushion, they would have a framework in place, yet we did not see anything.

The President said it was a no-brainer that they were going to get the deal done. Liberals have also used language such as “irritant” when talking about this industry that so many of our friends and families depend on to put food on the table. All we have seen is fluff from the government and no action. Not at all.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to give this another try.

There have been discussions among the parties, and if you were to seek it I think you would find that there is consent to adopt the following motion.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 18, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: Does the opposition whip have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and share this time with the hon. member for Prince George.

There are thousands of Canadian forestry jobs that depend on a strong agreement that protects Canadian access to the U.S. market for our softwood lumber. The \$65-billion-a-year forest products industry represents about 2% of Canada's gross domestic product and is one of the country's largest employers. The forest sector provides good-paying jobs in over 230 cities and towns across Canada. The industry directly employs 230,000 Canadians, mostly in communities that need them the most, in northern and rural Canada.

Now that the one-year standstill period has expired, hefty U.S. duties could be slapped on Canadian timber exports to the United States by early 2017. This failure to agree probably means a costly and frustrating new season ahead for Canadian timber companies, which can expect to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to the U.S. government in order to keep shipping their product south of the Canadian-U.S. border.

The Forest Products Association of Canada members include the largest manufacturers of forest products in Canada, in communities across the country, such as Millar Western forest products, West Fraser, Weyerhaeuser, which are all located in my riding of Yellowhead. This forest industry provides local jobs for thousands within my riding. In fact, local mayors have been clear: failure to reach a fair and balanced softwood agreement will have huge negative impacts on the Yellowhead region.

In Alberta, the forest industry employs over 19,000 people, the majority of whom are in my riding. My constituents and the forest industry deserve to know what their future will be.

Mayor Glenn McLean of Drayton Valley stated that:

In order for Drayton Valley's forest products industry to remain strong, we require a fair and balanced agreement on softwood lumber. Hundreds of local jobs depend on a sound trading relationship with the U.S.

Mayor Rob Mackin of Hinton stated:

Forestry is vital to our region, providing jobs for hundreds in Hinton alone. Because this is a priority issue, finding a successful resolution on the softwood lumber agreement is crucial to the sustainability of the industry and our communities.

Mayor Greg Pasychny of Edson where I live stated:

Forestry has been and remains a vital part of our regional economy. It has kept a significant portion of our community employed with high quality jobs. Failure to reach an appropriate softwood lumber agreement would have a huge negative impact on our community.

In 2014, 66% of Canadian softwood exports were shipped to the U.S. Today, 96% of all softwood lumber imports into the United States are from Canada. Today, Canada holds about 20% of the U.S. market. The 2006 softwood lumber agreement capped the Canadian share at 34%. However, we have never reached that number.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade promised 400,000 Canadian forestry workers a framework agreement on softwood lumber exports with the Obama administration by mid-June 2016. It has not happened. With the government's failure to meet the June deadline and the October 12 deadline for the last trade agreement, it is imperative that the current Liberal government take all necessary steps to prevent a trade war that will threaten the livelihood of Canadian workers and communities. This would be war number five.

This year, the Liberal members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade voted against our Conservative motion to have the Minister of International Trade convene a round table to determine a national agenda for the softwood lumber negotiations.

Negotiating a new softwood lumber agreement has never been a priority for the government. It was not included in the minister's mandate letter or in the Speech from the Throne, and now, after a year in office, the Liberals have failed to get it done. The government has now missed the deadline for a new softwood lumber agreement.

Whether it is failing to find a solution to the softwood lumber dispute or creating more uncertainty for pipeline development, Liberal policies are stifling private sector investment that creates jobs for hard-working Canadian families.

● (1615)

The softwood lumber agreement expired on October 12. The Liberal government has failed to create jobs and grow the economy, and has now failed forestry workers and their families. As recently as June, U.S. timber interests were demanding that Canada agree to limit softwood lumber shipments, such that the Canadian share of the U.S. lumber consumption is capped at 25%. That is down almost 10% from where it was. This is lower than Canada's 2015 market share of 30%, and well below the 34% that we reached before the two countries signed the last agreement in 2006.

Richard Garneau, the U.S. trade representative, said in a recent interview that Canada has traditionally accounted for about one-third of the U.S. lumber market. However, we are hearing rumours through sources that the U.S. wants to gradually reduce this to 22%. The temporary accord negotiated by former prime minister Stephen Harper bridged this disagreement by agreeing that duties would be imposed on U.S.-bound softwood lumber when prices fell below a certain level, and set a mechanism for managing disputes. The industry no longer has this predictability and stability. The previous Conservative government provided an extension with the 2006 softwood lumber agreement. We are now open for another war.

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The U.S. Lumber Coalition has indicated that it is exploring options to launch trade action against Canadian lumber, which cost the Canadian industry over \$5 billion during the last dispute, and 15,000 jobs in British Columbia alone. That is why the Conservative opposition has created a softwood lumber task force to hold the Liberal government accountable for solving the softwood lumber trade dispute with the United States.

Canadian forestry workers deserve stability and predictability from their government. After promising a deal within 100 days after the Prime Minister's trip to Washington in February, the Liberals were unwilling to put in the hard work to actually deliver on their promise. Saying that it was a tough deal to negotiate is a poor excuse to offer to the families who will lose their livelihoods. Instead of bringing Canadian industry together to develop a common position in these negotiations, the Liberals have pitted one region against another.

I am proud to be a member of the Conservative softwood lumber task force. I will continue to reach out to forestry companies, workers, and municipal leaders in areas where forestry is the primary economic driver, and will reach out to other stakeholders from coast to coast to solicit their recommendations for a solution. An agreement should stabilize the forestry sector in every region of Canada, and that is why the task force was launched: to petition those affected for their recommendations.

The forestry sector generates approximately 370,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada. I usually round it off to 400,000, which is probably closer. It was the Conservative government that negotiated an extension of the deal in 2012 to ensure market stability through to October 2016.

Alberta is hurting. It now has some of the highest jobless rates in the country. The downturn in Alberta's energy sector has spilled into other parts of the economy, and the unemployment rate is above 8% for the first time since the early 1990s. Canadian softwood lumber executives met recently with the American trade ambassador as they braced for the prospect of U.S. tariffs that they say could result in mill closures and layoffs.

It is imperative that all stakeholders come together for the good of the industry, the economy, and all hard-working Canadians affected by the forestry industry. Speaking on a personal note, in my riding alone, eight communities will be directly affected by this trade deal if it is not signed, and signed as soon as possible.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague for his whole speech.

However, I am surprised at all his criticism of our government, of my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, and of the minister.

Over the past few weeks and months our colleagues have been committed to working non-stop on negotiating with the U.S. negotiating team and with the industry. They have worked tirelessly with the goal of reaching an agreement.

The question I have for my colleague is the following: if this was so important to the Conservatives, then why did they allow the

softwood lumber agreement to expire without entering into formal negotiations with the Americans?

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across well knows that the agreement expired during the past election. We had started in talks with the U.S. government, and it was left to the current government, which has had over a year, to solve the softwood lumber agreement.

Unfortunately, any talks taking place during the election would have resulted in complaints from both sides, the Liberals and the NDP. It was impossible to hold the talks then.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although I find today's opposition motion to be very important, we must remember that the agreements negotiated by the Conservatives in 2006 and 2012 left the forestry industries paying a heavy price. The Canadian sector had to create a \$50-million system that still did not prevent the United States from taking legal action against Canada. This resulted in losses worth \$1 billion in 2012.

Clearly, we need to have a plan B, because another softwood lumber dispute is taking shape, and it is going to cost our businesses even more jobs and probably more money, too. In Montérégie, over 4,000 jobs are in the forestry sector.

Do the Conservatives agree that we need a plan B to be able to support our entrepreneurs and jobs here at home?

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative caucus believes that we must get the best deal, it must be a good deal, and it must be a fair deal for the Canadian forestry industry and forestry workers. There may be sub-parts to that, but those are up to the group that is negotiating with the U.S. government.

Again, I repeat: it must be the best deal we can get, it must be a good deal, and it must be fair for all regions of Canada.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the colleague mentioned a bit about communities, but he talked in broader terms.

Could he possibly give us some details of what this would mean in the communities in his riding?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, eight communities will be directly affected if this agreement is not signed as quickly as possible and, again, done in the best way we can, making sure it is a good deal, and making sure it is fair.

The eight communities range from small hamlets to larger communities, such as Hinton, Edson, and Drayton Valley, and also many small independent contractors located across the Yellowhead, across British Columbia, Quebec, and all parts of Canada. It is the small family-run operations that are also going to be directly affected. We must make sure that we get this agreement signed, and signed in the best way we can.

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska, Democratic Reform; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Veterans Affairs; the hon. member Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Disaster Assistance.

I see the hon. member for Yukon rising on a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives would like to change some of their members on committees. If the House gives its consent, I move that the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier today be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SOFTWOOD LUMBER AGREEMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to set the record straight on the softwood lumber file. As the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster rightly notes, softwood lumber is the main source of the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Canadians in communities across the country. That is why concluding a new softwood lumber agreement is so critical to the continued prosperity of Canada's softwood lumber industry. However, the Government of Canada is looking for a good deal, not an agreement at any cost.

There can be no denying that softwood lumber has been the subject of longstanding disputes between Canada and the United States, disputes that have been grounded in differences in forest management practices. Over the past 35 years, Canadian producers have faced four rounds of U.S. Department of Commerce investigations and related trade remedy action. These have been followed on three occasions by the conclusion of managed trade

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agreements. In other words, since the early 1980s, Canada has experienced very few months when either litigation or managed trade have not been applied to its softwood lumber exports to the United States. With this in mind, we are working intensively to avoid a fifth dispute cycle, and have been doing so since our election.

The long history of trade in softwood lumber products between Canada and the United States reveals just how highly integrated and intertwined our industries truly are. It also highlights the enormous costs to economies and communities on both sides of the border if we do not get a deal right.

The forestry sector is an important driver of economic growth in Canada. It contributed over \$20 billion to Canada's GDP in 2015, the majority from softwood lumber production. However, despite considerable success in developing new markets for Canadian softwood lumber, the reality is that our industry remains highly dependent on trade with the United States. Canadian softwood lumber exports to the United States totalled \$6 billion in 2015, representing 69% of total softwood exports. Securing stable access to this market is therefore essential for the more than 200,000 Canadians in some 171, mostly rural, municipalities that depend on this industry for their well-being.

As I just noted, successive governments have sought to ensure access to the United States markets for our softwood lumber products through managed trade agreements.

[Translation]

Such agreements enable us to go beyond simple disputes over forest management practices, softwood lumber pricing systems, and the forestry programs currently in dispute. The repercussions of forest development without a trade agreement in place became perfectly clear during the last round of disputes between 2001 and 2006, when the American industry took trade remedy action to stop Canadian softwood lumber imports. At that time, that is, between 2001 and 2006, it was the largest trade dispute in the world.

My hon. colleague certainly knows that when that conflict was over, the Canadian industry had to pay over \$5.5 billion in duties. The average tariff rates on softwood lumber exports to the United States in 2006 reached over 25%. This situation had an obvious, immediate, and devastating impact on the industry. Fifty-six Canadian sawmills shut down during that time, which cost us over 7,000 jobs.

Some say that it would be better for Canada to resolve this dispute through litigation. We understand those who believe that Canada is not at fault in this matter and that it should stand up and fight. Canada has certainly won some legal battles in international courts. However, we should be clear that a lawsuit costs money. It is a lengthy and arduous undertaking. In fact, the legal costs of the last dispute imposed yet another financial burden on Canadian businesses, which had already been hit hard by punitive countervailing duties.

We have to admit that the 2006 softwood lumber agreement was far from ideal.

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•(1630)

However, that agreement did manage to reasonably balance the interests of producers on both sides of the border. The agreement allowed Canadian softwood lumber exporters to have access to U.S. markets that was predictable and stable for many years.

While Canada has been saying for a long time that it is prepared to extend the 2006 softwood lumber agreement, the U.S. has clearly indicated that it wants to negotiate a new agreement. It believes that the market has changed significantly since 2006, and that this must be reflected in any future deal.

It is true that the market has changed in the past decade. The mountain pine beetle infestation has ravaged western Canada's forests. The 2008 global economic crisis devastated the U.S. housing market and upset the balance between global supply and demand. Canadian producers have opened new markets in Asia, while cross-border investment in the forestry sector is at a record high. The new softwood lumber agreement must reflect these new realities.

The things I have been saying since the beginning of my speech may give the impression that the softwood lumber issue is doomed to failure. However, I assure my colleagues that I do not believe that that is the case. When she took office, our minister inherited a softwood lumber agreement that was already expired. Nevertheless, I would like to assure the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster that the government has been working on resolving this problem since it took office.

The softwood lumber issue has attracted the attention of the highest offices of both countries. The Prime Minister and the President of the United States have been personally involved in dealing with this issue on several occasions. They met twice to discuss softwood lumber and they both reaffirmed the willingness of their respective governments to come to an agreement that offers “the stability, consistency and flexibility necessary to achieve the confidence of both industries”.

On June 29, in their joint statement, the Prime Minister and the President of the United States set out the nine key features of the new softwood lumber agreement. Most of them are things that Canadian stakeholders commonly identified as essential to the negotiation of future softwood lumber agreements. We listened to them.

Those key features include flexible structure, provisions for company exclusions, a meaningful, effective and timely regional exits process, effective enforcement tools, associated commitments regarding the use of trade remedies, and provisions to address other issues, such as making adequate arrangements available to remanufacturers and renewing the commitment to joint market development.

The Minister of International Trade also worked with her American counterpart, Michael Froman, the United States Trade Representative, to move this file forward as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Over the past few months, the combined efforts of the minister, Ambassador MacNaughton, and federal officials have resulted in at least 65 in-person meetings and countless telephone calls with

provincial and territorial representatives, industry stakeholders, union representatives, and indigenous group representatives.

In all, 16 rounds of talks took place between Canadian negotiators and their American counterparts at the Office of the United States Trade Representative. In addition, two round tables with major Canadian and U.S. industry representatives were held recently.

The government's work has clearly borne fruit.

•(1635)

During the April and June hearings of the Standing Committee on International Trade, industry representatives from the largest exporters of softwood lumber in the province congratulated the government on its determination. The minister and federal officials have made unparalleled efforts to create a dialogue, not only with Canada's primary exporters, but also with small producers such as lumber remanufacturers and manufacturers of specialized products made of softwood lumber.

In keeping with the efforts our government is making to establish nation-to-nation relationships with indigenous groups, steps have been taken to consult first nations representatives, especially from sawmills that belong to those nations.

[English]

Our consultations have taken place through various mechanisms including face-to-face consultations, regular updates through dedicated consultative forums for government and industry, formal and informal bilateral meetings, and exchanges of correspondence with premiers and ministers across the country.

What we have learned has informed and continues to inform our evolving strategy on softwood lumber, but our consultations have made abundantly clear just how diverse the softwood lumber industry is across Canada. As the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster undoubtedly knows, the Canadian softwood lumber industry is characterized by different interests and sensitivities between and within regions and industry segments. This does not make concluding a new softwood lumber agreement impossible, but it does mean that negotiating a fair agreement in the interests of Canadian producers, stakeholders, and interlocutors requires the balancing of priorities, conditions, and viewpoints that are often, frankly, at odds.

On that note, allow me to return to what I said at the beginning. Our government wants a new deal, and we have been working hard since the beginning to make it happen. However, we will not accept a deal at any cost, and a number of members opposite have indeed talked about a fair deal, an equitable deal. That is what we are going to get. I echo the Minister of International Trade's commitment that the government will vigorously and tenaciously defend Canadian softwood lumber producers and their interests should trade action be launched by the United States. It has not happened yet, but should it happen we will defend ourselves.

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With the expiry last week of the one-year standstill period, the softwood lumber file has clearly entered a new phase. U.S. industry is now in a legal position to petition the U.S. Department of Commerce for trade action against Canadian softwood lumber imports. While we are actively preparing for litigation, the Minister of International Trade has made it abundantly clear that negotiations can and will continue, and will be our priority. Both the minister and Ambassador Froman communicated as much in their recent joint statement on softwood lumber, issued on October 12. In it, they committed their respective governments to continue “negotiations in an effort to achieve a durable and equitable solution for North American softwood lumber producers, downstream industries and consumers.”

The October 12 statement reflects the importance of the broader Canada-U.S. trading relationship to the prosperity of Canadians. For almost 20 years, there had been no state visit by a Canadian prime minister to Washington and no speech by a U.S. president in our Parliament. In just under a year, our government has changed this dynamic and given the Canada-U.S. relationship the attention that it demands and deserves. That is more than I can say about the previous government. I think that helps us in moving forward on the softwood lumber file.

I therefore urge all hon. members of the House to support the government in its continued efforts to secure a new, fair, and equitable softwood lumber agreement with the United States.

• (1640)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by offering some comments about the hard-working United Steelworkers in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. My riding is home to two Western Forest Products mills, one in Cowichan Bay and one in Chemainus. Also many residents in my riding work in several mills to the riding north of mine, the riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Forestry traditionally has been a big part of my riding. It is a big part of Vancouver Island's history and many communities had their start precisely because of that industry. I want to express some sympathy to our trade negotiators. The political climate of the United States in the middle of an election cycle means protectionism is very high. That being said, the Liberal government has now been in power for one year and surely the Department of International Trade could have foreseen what the political climate was going to be like.

For the parliamentary secretary, with the year the department has had, what has been the detailed version of plan B that the government has come up with pending a worst case scenario? That is what the companies and workers in my riding want to hear. What are the plans for a worst case scenario? Companies want that certainty.

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I certainly share the member's concern for his constituents. I grew up in a small town in Ontario that had a lot of Steelworkers as well, in this case working for Inco. I also understand there are forestry industries across the country including paper interests in my own riding, so even in urban ridings we are in some ways strongly linked to the forestry industry. In any event, we govern for everyone and we have to take everyone's concerns into primary account.

The plan B is, as the minister said earlier, a double track process where we are prepared to defend our interests in front of trade tribunals. It is not the best case scenario but that is what we had to do, the Liberal governments under Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien, in order to get rulings from the WTO and NAFTA last time around. That is the plan this time and we will keep every single option open moving forward in order to help Canadian workers.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened quite intently to the parliamentary secretary's speech. I must say I was disappointed with it. We are speaking of an industry that hundreds, if not thousands and thousands of jobs are dependent on. It is a massive industry, yet he tells Canadians that they should not worry about it too much, that our Prime Minister was invited to a dinner with the President and he was able to take his family there, and we had the President back here and he spoke in Parliament and we have never seen this before. Well, if that is what Canadians are to take some solace in, given how the United States negotiates, we are in trouble.

In 2002 and 2003 with the Chrétien and Paul Martin governments, they did not get the job done. There were 27% tariffs put on Canadian softwood lumber. In 2006 we had an agreement, but it has run out now.

We know the Liberals want a good deal, we want a good deal, but what can the parliamentary secretary give us for a timeline? What can he tell Canadians today, in spite of the economy going down and job losses in every other sector, to give them some confidence?

• (1645)

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I regret that the member missed the gist of my speech, which was to say to Canadians that we are fighting on all levels to negotiate but also to prepare ourselves for litigation, if necessary. Why? Because we are fighting for their interests. As numerous people on all sides of the House have pointed out, we need to have an agreement that is fair and equitable. There is no point accepting an agreement that will cost Canadians jobs and that will destroy our industry.

The fact of the matter is that it takes two sides to negotiate. It is easy to criticize the government, but we have a negotiating partner and we have created the context in which we can negotiate. However, there is still a gap and the American negotiating position is still not where we want it. It is not yet acceptable.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that the softwood lumber industry in Atlantic Canada is extremely important to our economy. As the parliamentary secretary said earlier, this is all about forest management practices. I know he and his colleagues are working very hard on this, but I have been through several of these and they are all complicated.

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Over the last 20 years, the American industry has acknowledged that Atlantic Canadian provinces have forestry practices exactly like theirs and because of that they have provided a total exclusion for all the Atlantic provinces on this softwood lumber agreement. We have not been part of it. In fact, the second last agreement had three signatures on it: the Canadian government, the U.S. government, and the Maritime Lumber Bureau. Considering how important it is to Atlantic Canada that we maintain this total exclusion, can the parliamentary secretary tell us whether an exclusion will be part of the next agreement?

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his work on this file over the years and for his question.

Indeed, as I said in my speech, we have had an unprecedented degree of consultation across the country. We understand the various regional nuances across the country and they have formed an integral part of our negotiating strategy, such as is the case here. We are trying to renew, under the best case scenario, that exclusion once again.

We have listened. We have been close to the industry and workers. We have an idea of what our minimum position is, and that is hopefully where we will get to.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the member opposite tell the House what concrete steps the government is taking to have litigation suspended during the negotiation process?

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, at this stage, the first step of the litigation process would be in the hands of the American industry, as to whether it would want an inquiry in the U.S. Department of Commerce. That has yet to happen. We have a strategy. If and when that does happen we would react, but at this stage it has yet to happen. We will look at all other options in order to help Canadian forestry workers and the Canadian industry along the way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague across the aisle.

The people of Longueuil—Saint-Hubert certainly know from reading the newspaper that panic is starting to set in. People are worried and are scratching their heads, wondering how we could have reached this point, in a society as structured as ours. The Liberals have been in power for a year now. When they first took office, they knew, just as all parties knew during the election campaign, that the softwood lumber deal was about to expire, so they have had a year as a sort of “buffer” to negotiate.

Why has so little been achieved after all this time? What happened at the end of 2015? Had there been any progress at all? I am trying to give my colleagues opposite an out. Had the Conservatives begun any work on this?

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The answer is no, as the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean admitted. The Conservatives discussed it among themselves. However, they never communicated with our American friends before October 12 of last year.

Our government took over. We had many rounds of negotiations: there were 16 rounds in one year. That is quite something for negotiating teams. There have been several meetings between the minister and her counterpart, two meetings between the President and the Prime Minister, and many phone calls to people throughout North America.

We took over enthusiastically. It is a difficult process that has many challenges. However, we are working very hard and we will continue to work very hard to protect Canadians' interests.

● (1650)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I am pleased to represent the thousands of Canadians, both in my riding of eastern Ontario and in northern Ontario, who make a living in the working forest. Of the many issues I have championed for Canadians as a member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, defending Canada's forestry industry was one of my first responsibilities when I was elected six elections ago. As a member of my party's softwood lumber task force, I am not pleased that I am still talking about some of the same issues regarding softwood lumber after 16 years.

It was our Conservative government that negotiated an agreement by the end of April 2006, within three months of coming into office, to solve the last softwood lumber dispute. As a member of the government that signed the current agreement that expired on October 12, 2015, I recognize there were critics of that agreement, just as there were critics, like myself, of the previous agreement that had been negotiated by the old Chrétien administration.

Our government recognized that signing a deal that would satisfy everyone would have resulted in no deal, which was unacceptable, just as no deal today is unacceptable. Too many Canadian jobs are at risk. The softwood lumber industry in my riding is characterized by small operations, many family owned, and by people who depend on jobs from the working forest.

When I was first elected, the old Chrétien government softwood lumber policy was causing significant unemployment in my riding. Worried softwood lumber producers called my office on a regular basis with the hope that a resolution regarding the softwood lumber dispute was over. History is about to repeat itself if Canadians do not see action today.

Forestry contributes \$20 billion to Canada's GDP. The forestry sector generates approximately 370,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada. Winter is coming. Families with their principal breadwinner employed in the forestry industry wonder how they will survive this winter as they wait for this administration to act.

Business of Supply

Since the last agreement was signed by our Conservative government, things have changed. The Liberal Party is making it a lot tougher to live in rural Canada and places like eastern Ontario where these jobs exist. Skyrocketing hydroelectricity rates, the plan to ban the burning of firewood for heat, and a carbon tax that would add 10¢ a litre on the only means of transportation for rural Canadians spells hard times. If times are tough when they have a job, imagine how tough it is going to be when they have no job, with all these new Liberal taxes.

In rural areas, jobs are hard to come by. Ben Hokum & Son Limited in Killaloe, Murray Brothers in Madawaska, McRae Lumber in Whitney, Lavern Heideman & Sons in Eganville, Gulick Forest Products Ltd., Randy Commanda Forestry at Pikwakanagan, Thomas J. Neuman Ltd., Pastway Planing in Palmer Rapids, and Bell Lumber in Renfrew are just a few of the businesses in my riding that will be affected by no new softwood lumber agreement. For Canada's forestry industry, for the people employed in that industry, and for the businesses that provide that employment that need certainty in their business if they are to continue to invest in their businesses and create jobs, an agreement is critical.

The nine year agreement, which outlined tariffs and guidelines for the lumber trade between Canada and the U.S., has expired. The one year standstill period, negotiated by our Conservative government when in power, has now expired as well, with no free trade solution and no sign that an agreement is on the horizon.

American producers allege the Canadian forestry industry is subsidized by the federal and provincial governments. In the U.S., prices are set by the market, a situation that the U.S. contends is unfair compared to the way Canada manages its forests. It believes Canadian lumber should be subject to a tariff to offset the so-called subsidy. In the past, the U.S. has introduced anti-dumping and countervailing duty investigations against Canadian softwood lumber. Canada has successfully defended itself against those actions.

● (1655)

In Canada, 94% of the forest is on public lands. By law, all forest harvested on public lands must be regenerated. All harvested trees are regrown. At 161 million hectares or 43%, Canada has the highest volume of independently assessed, certified, sustainably managed forests in the world.

Canada's forest companies work with environmental groups, like Ducks Unlimited Canada, Pollution Probe, Nature Canada, and the Prime Minister's principal secretary's favourite, World Wildlife Fund.

The working forest benefits the aboriginal community in my riding. About 70% of aboriginal communities are located in forested areas. Forest companies are one of the largest employers of aboriginal people. Far more forest is damaged by fire and insects, compared to the sustainable harvest that takes place in Canada. Canadian mills are cleaner and greener.

What Canadians need is a lasting solution to ensure fair treatment of the Canadian lumber industry. For Ontario, trade with the United States is significant for the forestry industry. While up to 95% of Ontario's forestry products exports go to the United States, Ontario's

share of the U.S. market equates to 3.34%. A producer in Ontario is selling domestically or to the United States.

Jobs have been disappearing at an alarming rate in rural Ontario. The need to keep jobs in the lumber industry to maintain our way of life is paramount. Forestry is big business in Ontario, exporting \$3.6 billion worth of goods annually, and employing over 43,000 people, many of whom work in eastern Ontario.

Wages and salaries add up to almost \$2 billion in the Ontario economy. In the Ottawa Valley, the forest industry supports thousands of jobs. Primary wood manufacturing in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is over 10 times the provincial average. I can identify over 100 forest product companies that make their home in Renfrew county. The Canadian forest products industry is a major manufacturing sector, responsible for 12% of Canada's manufacturing GDP.

What is also important in this debate over softwood lumber is how it is affecting our trading relationship with the United States. For value-added products, the United States market is number one in Ontario. More than half of all forest products in Ontario are exported. Members will understand why we, on this side of the House, use the term "crisis" when we refer to the state of the Canadian softwood lumber industry. Those products have the largest export market in the United States. Exports from Ontario have increased by more than 100% since 1991.

The United States construction industry is worth nearly \$700 billion U.S. every year. It will continue to be the focus of Canadian wood product shipments. It is imperative that the government respect the special trading relationship we have had in the past and prioritize the need to resolve this trade dispute. The time is now to see if all the toadying up to the current U.S. President by the Prime Minister will make any difference. It is clear that whoever is the next president of the U.S. is bad news for Canadians. A new president means any negotiations go back to zero.

It is clear a softwood lumber crisis must be avoided. We all knew the softwood lumber agreement was expiring last week. If the current administration is paying the slightest attention, it will know the American lumber industry will push for punitive measures. Ontario lumber mills have continued to invest in their operations, and they are disappointed at the lack of government support for the industry. They need access to the U.S. market. They are looking for a more aggressive position by the Canadian and Ontario governments to ensure Ontario gets its fair share of employment.

The time has come to stand up for Canadian jobs.

● (1700)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the comments of members of the official opposition with respect to this motion. I want to pose a simple question for the hon. member.

Business of Supply

It is easy to criticize the current progress with respect to negotiations on a softwood lumber agreement, but does my friend have an actual set of concrete suggestions that she could provide to this side of the House, to the minister and the parliamentary secretary on what would be an acceptable framework for such an agreement?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, months ago I began meeting with my forestry products people as well as mill owners. For Eastern Ontario in particular, there is a number of provisions they would like to have made, specifically, exclusions. When the original softwood lumber agreement was negotiated, a number of different species was included that never should have been. They are specialty woods, not building wood. For example, eastern cedar should not be included. It is a speciality wood. Red and white pine, and hemlock should not be included. This is just one of a few of the important features that we would like to see built into the agreement being negotiated now.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad we have had this day to focus on softwood lumber.

I wonder if the member could highlight what it means to individuals and families not only in her riding but in the whole of Ontario of not having an agreement in place and what it would mean to them if we lost access to the U.S. market.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, at one time the forestry industry in my riding was the largest employer. Now we are down to about 8,000 jobs in the riding. The whole area along the Ottawa River was originally settled around the lumber industry. There are no other jobs for people to go to in rural Eastern Ontario. The Liberal government has not given any priority to expanding broadband Internet to rural areas and there is a huge broadband and cellphone gap in my riding. We cannot get those high-tech jobs.

Right now, the increased price of electricity is really tough on the lumber industry. The greatest and growing input cost is electricity.

It is tough to get the product across the border into the U.S. market. With the looming carbon tax adding at least another 10%, it will be untenable. More people will be out of work. More people will be hungry. More people will become dependent on other people.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague whether, during this conflict or this potential trade war over softwood lumber between Canada and the United States, she agrees that the government should provide more support to the forestry industry than the Conservatives did at the time.

Under the Conservatives, there was a lawsuit that resulted in a \$1-billion loss to the industry. Even though Canada eventually won in court, the industry paid the price.

Should the Liberals have a plan B in the current negotiations to ensure this does not happen again and to protect the 300,000 Canadian forestry workers?

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, while the negotiations are going on, the litigation must be suspended. As of yet, we have not heard today whether any effort has been made to stop the litigation while we are negotiating an agreement.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the member feel there is any chance that the Liberals will get this job done, knowing how they folded and buckled with the Keystone pipeline despite the bromance between Obama and our Prime Minister? They completely walked away from that deal. Does the member feel this will happen on the softwood lumber agreement as well?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I do not see any intention on the part of the government to put forward the interests of the softwood lumber industry whatsoever. In Ontario we have seen the Liberals keep on shrinking the footprint where we are allowed to lumber and increasing the input costs, including electricity, and now another tax. They do not want the softwood lumber industry to be prosperous. Rather, they want it to end.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in favour of the critical motion before us regarding the lack of action by the Liberal government to secure a softwood lumber agreement.

It is conventional wisdom that the constituency of Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa is primarily an agricultural constituency. To a large extent that is true. However, in the northern part of my constituency I have significant forestry operations, such as spruce products. Louisiana-Pacific moved into the area some 25 years ago, creating 400 full-time jobs in an area where jobs were desperately required. Therefore, the forestry industry in my constituency is extremely important, and the issue across the country is too important for the Liberals to sit across the way, doing nothing, and putting the livelihood of so many Canadian families in my constituency and the rest of Canada in jeopardy.

The situation was possibly best summed up in a recent news article by Mr. Kevin Mason, managing director of ERA Forest Products Research, a Vancouver-based financial research company, who said, “It’s going to be ugly. There’s going to be mill closures. It’s going to be messy.”

As many of us will remember, during the last dispute, over 15,000 jobs were lost in British Columbia alone, and the Canadian forest industry had to pay \$4.5 billion in duties. With an economy facing sluggish growth to begin with and tax increases being posed by the Liberals, the lumber industry and the forestry industry in general need certainty and stability more than ever.

As has been said by previous speakers, this very important sector generates approximately 270,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada, often based in rural and remote areas where good, high paying jobs are often very hard to find. A mill that employs 250 people in a small town can be the centrepiece of a local community’s economy, and a closure can be devastating.

Business of Supply

As members know, the previous softwood lumber agreement expired on October 12, 2016, and the Liberal government has failed to negotiate a new one. In fact, it waited a year, which is astonishing. This means that U.S. lumber producers can and likely will file legal action immediately. It also means that the Canadian export market could be looking at 30% tariff increases very soon. This is a heavy hit to the bottom line of our lumber export companies and will undoubtedly lead to the suspension of production, job layoffs, and even mills shutting down completely, all because the Liberal government is unable or unwilling to make the economy of rural communities a priority. I will come back to that later on in my speech.

An agreement needs to be put in place that will stabilize the forestry sector in every region of Canada. However, due to the Liberal government inaction, the official opposition has launched a task force to petition those affected for their recommendations. We must bring the Canadian industry together to develop a common position in these negotiations instead of pitting one region against another. This task force will consult with forestry stakeholders, especially those communities whose major employer is tied to the forestry industry.

Many Liberals may not understand how important a mill is to a rural or remote community, as well as the spillover effect it has across an entire region or a country. Recently, the Manitoba forestry industry was thrown into crisis when the Tolko mill at The Pas was threatened with closure, and it came very close. There are very encouraging signs from the Conservative government in Manitoba, led by Premier Brian Pallister, that there is possibly a deal on the horizon that will save that particular mill.

What people do not realize is that the forestry industry is not just about a plant in a town. Rather, the ripple effects of the forestry industry go right across an entire region. Tolko was a paper mill. The paper industry and the lumber industry are intertwined. One might think the pending closure of a paper mill would not affect a lumber mill. However, what happens in the forestry sector is that when a lumber mill mills a tree, it takes the lumber from inside the tree, and the slabs on the outside, which are the finest fibres of a tree, and chips them and sends them to a paper mill. Therefore, the closure of a lumber mill or a paper mill can affect each other very significantly. The potential loss of the Tolko mill has the potential to kill 1,500 forestry jobs, even though that particular mill supports 300 direct jobs.

• (1710)

I had the honour of working for the Pine Falls Paper Company back in the mid 1990s. It was a wonderful success story, but also a story of failure. What happened in the early 1990s is that newsprint prices went down dramatically and that particular mill at Pine Falls was an Abitibi-Price mill. Many members here, especially from Quebec, would know the Abitibi-Price company. It was a newsprint-producing mill.

The mill was threatened with closure in the early 1990s, so the workers got together with the Conservative government of the day under premier Gary Filmon and the workers themselves bought the mill. They took a pay cut and entered into profit-sharing agreements. Right about that time, I left the employ of the provincial government

and joined the Pine Falls Paper Company as the environmental director. Therefore, I have had first-hand experience in the forestry industry and got to live in a forestry town.

There has been a lot of talk in speeches about dollars and cents, trade law, lawyers, and so on, but what is forgotten is the human side of the forestry industry. What I learned when I lived in Pine Falls is that the forestry industry has a very definite culture. Those towns are different, they are special, and they are valuable. Because a major employer is in a town—in this particular case there were 500 full-time jobs—there are ball teams and hockey teams, Rotary Clubs, the churches are full, and there is a thriving society based around that particular mill.

As the 1990s wore on, newsprint was being replaced with iPads, people were reading newspapers on computers, and the demand for newsprint went down. What happened, which was inevitable, is that the mill was sold to a company called Tembec. Tembec then decided to make the mill even more efficient and instituted a process that some members may be familiar with, thermomechanical pulping.

A thermomechanical pulping mill goes hand in hand with a lumber mill, and Tembec had a plan to downsize the workforce at the paper mill and increase the workforce at the lumber mill. As I said earlier, paper production and lumber production go hand in hand. In the late 1990s, it looked like the Pine Falls paper mill and the associated lumber mill were going to have a very bright future. Then the U.S. action against our softwood lumber exports hit, and hit very hard. The mill converted to thermomechanical pulping, but the lumber mill was not economically viable any more. Actually, it was not even built. The plans were shelved and that particular mill was ultimately closed down.

By that time, I had left the mill, but I go back to that community from time to time. It is a tragic sight. I see the empty space, the size of two football fields, where a thriving paper mill used to be. The town is still a beautiful place, but there is a certain melancholy about the place. It is desolate. There is not the activity there used to be. This is the human cost of the loss of a major rural industry.

I am not really that interested in playing politics with this, though I am a politician and as partisan as everyone else. I would urge the Liberal members opposite to think about the people and culture of these communities and how important they are to our country. We all think Canada was founded by the fur trade, which, to a large extent, it was, but the forestry industry was equally important in creating this great country of ours.

In conclusion, I would also note, as the previous speaker said, that our forests are managed well and in an environmentally sound way. I managed a wastewater treatment plant at a paper mill. We know what we are doing in the forestry industry in Canada. We need to get a softwood lumber agreement in place, certainly for the jobs, the dollars and cents, but, as important, for the people and cultures of Canada's forestry communities.

Business of Supply

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member opposite. We might have to disagree at times on approaches to dealing with this issue. I do genuinely believe that this government, virtually from day one, has been aware of the situation and has aggressively worked with the different stakeholders.

However, as opposed to focusing my attention on that, I want to pick up on another aspect of the member's speech. I believe whether they are talking about the province of Quebec, of British Columbia, of Ontario, or our home province in Manitoba, the member has hit it right on regarding the importance of this particular industry to many of our rural communities and to a way of life in our communities. The member referred to wanting to see an apolitical discussion on this issue.

May I just ask the member what he believes would be in the industry's best interest? Given the national election that is happening south of the border, is it not in Canada's best interest to continue to pursuing a path in which we do not sign a deal for the sake of having a deal, but to ensure that we have one that will ensure as much as possible the future prosperity of many of the communities that we truly believe in?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I got a bit carried away: let us not carry this apolitical stuff too far, but I appreciate my hon. friend's comments.

One thing that I think has not been done is to focus on the consumers of Canadian softwoods in the U.S. If the U.S. lumber producers get their way, the price of houses in the U.S. will go up. I would suspect that the construction industry in the U.S. wants Canadian lumber to continue flowing across the border. So again, looking at the customers and the benefits that the U.S. gets from the lumber it buys from us, I think that would be a very good first step.

Again, I appreciate the member's comments. We all care about these forestry communities. They are beautiful places to be and wonderful places to live. I should make the point again, as someone who has spent an entire career in environmental conservation, that as was mentioned earlier, the conservation activities of Canada's forestry companies are second to none in the world. We have a world-class industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

It is close to the end of the day and some people may think that everything has been said. However, I am still amazed to hear some of the things members are saying. It is not a very high level of debate when someone says that we should not sign a deal for the sake of having a deal.

That is a given. That is such a basic thing to say. Given all the jobs that are at stake and the scope of our trade partnerships with the United States, that goes without saying. Obviously, we need a deal that makes sense.

I am therefore pleased to know that our party supports the Conservative Party's motion, but I would like to ask my colleague a question. Is it not true that, under the Conservative government, we had to go to court on several occasions and that we won? Did that not make the forestry industry lose billions of dollars?

• (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the style of agreement that ultimately comes out of this, I am made aware of one of the political rules: the perfect is the enemy of the good. I think I would be happy with a good agreement. I hope that the government is not insisting on perfection here. Trade and trade negotiations are all about give and take. Unfortunately, in Canada with our geographic location and our proximity to the U.S., we are in many cases at the mercy of the U.S. We should ensure that world trade rules are abided by, and unfortunately the U.S. has a habit of flouting those trade rules, which is very unfortunate.

Again, I would urge the Liberal government to work very hard. We have not seen much in the last year. I was proud of our government's track record on this particular file, but again the importance of forestry to many rural communities in my constituency and across the country needs to be recognized by the current government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest.

The negotiation of a new softwood lumber agreement with the United States that satisfies all of Canada's interests is one of the priorities of the Prime Minister and our government. The forestry industry is very important to the economic well-being of our country, including that of Quebec. The Government of Canada is well aware of the vital role that the softwood lumber industry plays in that province.

That is why the Minister of International Trade and her parliamentary secretary have been working closely with the Government of Quebec and the industry in that province since they accepted responsibility for this portfolio last November. The relationship between Canada and the United States is essential to a prosperous economy in all of the provinces and territories, including Quebec. Canada is and will remain a trading nation.

In that regard, Canada's relationship with the United States is a priority. The current government has placed particular emphasis on restoring Canada's relationship with the United States, an important and strategic relationship that has deteriorated over the past decade. It is therefore also essential to improve the tenor and tone of the bilateral agreement with the United States in order to find a solution to the softwood lumber issue.

The United States remains by far the largest export market for Canada and Quebec's softwood lumber products. In the past fiscal year, softwood lumber exports rose to \$6 billion, representing 69% of Canadian exports.

At the end of the day, together with Quebec, the other provinces and territories, Canada has every intention of finding a lasting and equitable solution that is beneficial to softwood lumber producers across the country, as well as to related industries and consumers.

Our government fully understands what is at stake for the forestry industry. The forestry sector supports more than 84,800 direct and indirect jobs within Quebec communities. These jobs are mostly in rural communities and provide a vital economic foundation for these regions. In 2015, the volume of softwood lumber exports from Quebec represented 20.6% of Canadian softwood lumber exports to the United States, or roughly \$1 billion.

Our government recognizes that the softwood lumber issue affects the success of an entire sector of the economy. Quebec's softwood lumber industry is a major contributor to the forestry sector in general. Sawmills provide essential inputs such as pulp and wood chips for the downstream production of other forestry sector products such as boards, paper, and the wood pellets needed for bioenergy production.

Entrepreneurs and businesses that operate in rural regions like mine, including for example the regional municipalities of Avignon, Mitis, Matane, and Matapédia, have developed innovative production methods in recent years. These businesses are the pride of their regions, and they need support to protect their markets in order to stay on track and continue to prosper.

The next chapter of this story will have a direct impact on the entire forestry sector in Quebec and in all regions of Canada. That is why the government is working so hard to reach a new softwood lumber deal that will guarantee forestry workers, as well as communities across Quebec and across Canada, a reliable, stable future.

The Minister of International Trade and officials from Global Affairs Canada have consulted extensively with representatives from the Quebec softwood lumber industry and the Government of Quebec. Since last November, the minister has engaged her provincial counterparts several times, including most recently on October 4, when she had a meeting with Ms. Anglade, the Quebec minister for economy, science and innovation, and Mr. Blanchette, the Quebec minister for forests, wildlife and parks. Those ministers made Quebec's position very clear, so the federal government has a good understanding of what that province's forestry sector needs.

The Minister of International Trade also met with representatives of Quebec's softwood lumber industry and spoke directly to representatives of all forestry companies active in Quebec. On June 6, she met with members of the Quebec Forest Industry Council, which represents the Quebec forestry industry in general, to talk about priority issues for the province's industry that should inform any future softwood lumber agreement.

● (1725)

In addition to all this, there have been countless telephone calls, regular meetings, and ongoing discussions among Global Affairs Canada negotiators, Government of Quebec representatives, and Quebec industry stakeholders. Consultations have included meetings with Quebec Border Mills, the Fédération des producteurs forestiers du Québec, and many companies.

Business of Supply

Our government recognizes that some Quebec industry stakeholders feel negotiation is not the best approach. They want the government to take the United States to court over free trade rather than negotiate a new agreement. We can understand why they would want to close ranks.

However, experience has taught us that a legal victory can be obtained only through considerable effort over many years during which Canada's industry would pay punitive tariffs. That is why the Minister of International Trade, at the Prime Minister's behest, is working very hard to negotiate an agreement that will satisfy lumber industry stakeholders across Canada.

Having said that, the government wants more than just an agreement. It wants to negotiate an agreement that will be good for Canada. The current government is prepared for anything and intends to fully defend Canada's interests if trade disputes occur once again. Just like the government's many in-depth consultations with the provinces, territories and other stakeholders in Canada, the consultations with Quebec have laid out the province's positions for negotiations with the United States. The Minister of International Trade and her representatives are very familiar with the issues that matter to each region, including Quebec. There will be close consultations as the softwood lumber file evolves.

The Conseil du patronat du Québec has congratulated us for all we have done to defend Quebec's forestry industry. The Quebec Forestry Industry Council says it is pleased with the current government's position on Quebec's forestry regime. The government worked closely with Quebec and will continue the dialogue as both parties move forward together.

The government paid particular attention to the reforms made by the Quebec government in 2013, which changed the softwood lumber pricing system to ensure that the value of timber from public forests is market based.

Throughout the discussions with the Minister of International Trade, the Government of Quebec and the province's industry made it clear how important it is for any future softwood lumber agreement to include a mechanism to take into account the changes made to its forestry practices.

The current government is also aware that a certain number of Quebec businesses were not included in the previous softwood lumber agreement under the pretext that the U.S. Department of Commerce did not consider them, individually, to be subsidized.

Business of Supply

That is why our government ensured that, in the joint statement on softwood lumber last June, the Prime Minister and President Obama stated that the key aspects of any new softwood lumber agreement would include provisions on excluding businesses as well as provisions promoting regional policies that eliminate the underlying causes of trade frictions, including a regional exit process that is appropriate, effective, and timely. The Government of Canada has made these issues priorities in the ongoing negotiations.

The Government of Quebec and Quebec's industry have clearly expressed where their interests lie in a new agreement. The current government, our government, listened to what they had to say. The Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade will continue to emphasize these key aspects as the Minister of International Trade pursues her negotiations with the United States.

Our government is defending and will continue to defend the interests of Quebec's industry and Canada's industry, as well as all the workers who actively contribute to the economic development of our region, of Quebec, and of Canada.

• (1730)

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I was very pleased to hear him talk about regional differences. As members know, Quebec has worked extremely hard to build a forestry regime and it is important that the government recognize that.

Over the course of the day, we have seen that the government recognizes Quebec's uniqueness, which is very important. Over 5,000 jobs are at stake in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and nothing has come of the negotiations.

What worries me is the balance of power. The Americans have made their decision, no matter what happens. The Prime Minister said that a framework was established when he met with President Barack Obama last spring. He even gave a speech here in the House.

I am wondering what the government plans to do to exercise our leadership and help us be strong. If we end up in a trade war and before the courts, is the government prepared to implement a plan B? Such a plan could consist of loan guarantees, for example. This would not be a subsidy for the forestry industry, but it would strengthen our position and show that we want to preserve our forestry industry. As my colleague mentioned in his speech, this is important because the industry is an economic contributor.

What does my colleague think that the government should do to strengthen our position, show our leadership, and send a clear message during negotiations with the Americans?

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I also thank her for being so dedicated to defending her region's interests, which is so important, and especially for defending the interests of the forestry industry and the men and women who work in this economic sector. This is important to us.

Our government, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, and the Minister of International Trade have shown unprecedented leadership. They have worked day after day to put themselves in a position to negotiate, to carry out negotiations, and to find common ground that will benefit not only Quebec and Canada, but all forestry industry workers.

Our leadership has resulted in negotiations that will produce an agreement. That is our goal, and that is what we will continue working toward.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could highlight the importance of the issue when it comes to government working with the different stakeholders.

Through the Prime Minister, the minister, and cabinet, we have seen a fairly aggressive agenda in terms of trying to make sure, as much as possible, that we are protecting the interests of this industry in all regions of our country. It meant that we had to go into the different stakeholder meetings and work with the individuals in play to try to achieve the best agreement possible.

Could the member provide some comment regarding how important it is that we work with the different stakeholders who are before us on this very important issue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is much appreciated.

As I said in my speech, one of the priorities shared by the Prime Minister, the Minister of International Trade, and her parliamentary secretary is holding good negotiations and consulting with the industry, workers, and companies.

In recent weeks, I myself have had opportunities to meet with various business people in my riding to gain a better understanding of the issues and try to figure out the best possible solutions. Companies have invested in innovation to improve productivity. Work is being done, and that is how we want to support our forestry industry.

As I said, the important thing is making sure that we can engage in negotiations to reach an agreement that is in the best interests of the forestry industry in Quebec and Canada.

• (1735)

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, securing a new softwood lumber agreement with the United States that works for all of Canada is a priority for the Prime Minister and our government.

The forestry sector is an essential part of the economic prosperity of the country, including the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island. The Government of Canada is fully aware of the vital role that the softwood lumber industry plays in Atlantic Canada.

This is why the Minister of International Trade, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of International Trade, and officials from Global Affairs Canada have been collaborating closely with the industry and the provincial governments of the Atlantic provinces.

Business of Supply

The Atlantic region, often referred as the Maritimes in a softwood lumber context, has a long-standing and unique position in the ongoing trade dispute between Canada and the United States. This century-old irritant in the bilateral trade relationship is rooted in differences in forest management practices in each country.

In the United States, most timber is harvested from private lands, with the cost of timber determined by the market. In Canada, the majority of forests are publicly owned, which would be about 92%, and provinces employ a range of administrative mechanisms to determine the market-based rates that are charged to industry for harvesting from crown lands. However, the U.S. lumber industry has argued that the price charged by provinces is a subsidy to Canadian lumber producers. We reject such assertions out of hand. Canadian lumber is market priced.

However, the Maritimes are exceptional, in the fact that a significant percentage of timber in this region comes from private lands. Furthermore, the price for crown timber in the Maritimes has been, and continues to be, based on a large pool of private transactions.

Over the past 35 years of the softwood lumber dispute, the United States government and the U.S. industry have consistently acknowledged that the lumber sourced from the Atlantic region was not subsidized. Exports of softwood lumber products from the Maritimes had never been found to be subsidized in any previous U.S. countervailing duty investigations into softwood lumber from Canada and have been excluded from every previous agreement.

This dates as far back as the 1987-88 amendment to the softwood lumber MOU, which was further enshrined in the 1996 Maritimes lumber agreement, also known as the maritime accord. The most recent chapter in the long-standing history of being excluded from the softwood lumber dispute was the 2006 softwood lumber agreement, under which softwood lumber products from the Maritimes, defined in the agreement as New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, were excluded from export measures.

The Maritimes and the northeastern states have a centuries-old interlinked economic relationship. Much like Canada's relationship with the United States, the Atlantic region's relationship with New England is vital to the economic prosperity of both sides of the border. Forest products are a key part of that economic partnership.

The government has prioritized rebuilding Canada's important and strategic relationship with the United States, which has suffered over the last decade. Improving the tenor and tone of our bilateral engagement with the United States is critical to finding a solution to the softwood lumber issue. Ultimately, Canada, in collaboration with the four Atlantic provinces and all other provinces and territories, is focused on finding a durable and equitable solution, and one that benefits softwood lumber producers across Canada, as well as related industries and consumers.

The government understands the importance of the forestry sector and softwood lumber trade with the United States for the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The forestry sector supports over 19,000 direct and indirect jobs in communities in the Atlantic

provinces. These are primarily in rural communities, and these jobs are vital to their regions.

In 2015, the Atlantic provinces exported 8.7% of total Canadian softwood lumber exports to the United States by volume, valued at approximately \$495 million. The Atlantic softwood lumber industry is a major contributor to the broader forestry sector.

The government recognizes that softwood lumber is about more than dimensional lumber. It is about the success of an entire economic sector and of rural communities. That is why the government is working so hard to negotiate a successor softwood lumber agreement that will provide stability and certainty for forestry workers in Atlantic Canada and across the country. This government has worked closely with Atlantic Canada and will continue this dialogue as they move forward together.

● (1740)

The Minister of International Trade and officials from Global Affairs Canada have consulted extensively with government officials from the four Atlantic provinces, and with several industry stakeholders, including the Atlantic lumber producers.

All have been unanimous in their discussions with the Minister of International Trade that they would support an agreement that works for all of Canada. However, they have been clear that given the historical record and the fact that the maritime system remains effectively unchanged, the Maritimes should be excluded from future subsidy investigations and exempt from border measures under a future softwood lumber agreement, as the region has traditionally been.

That is why this government ensured that the leaders' statement on softwood lumber from the Prime Minister and President Obama last June clearly stated that a key feature in any softwood lumber agreement would have provisions for regions or company exclusions.

The governments of the Atlantic provinces and their industry have been clear about their interests in a new agreement, and this government has listened. The Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade will continue to push for consultation and the continuation of the maritime exclusion as we negotiate with the United States.

Rest assured, this government will continue to defend the interests of Atlantic Canada's softwood lumber industry, and the industry as a whole, from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for her speech, but we have heard this narrative from the government side. It wants to tell us that it has turned the corner on the relationship with the United States, that it has a great relationship with the United States, and that apparently the previous government did not.

Business of Supply

None of that is really true. If we look at the results, we would expect, if that were the case, that it would have been able to achieve results on this deal. After three months when the Conservatives were in power, we achieved results. We got a deal done. The Liberals have had a year; they still do not have a deal.

I want to ask the member, if the relationship with the United States is such that the Prime Minister and others have said it is, then why can they not effectively advance Canada's interests in the context of this relationship? Why are we not using that relationship to actually get results for the Canadians we are supposed to be representing?

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues there. Over the past 10 years, our industries have changed, our economies have changed, the competing products have also changed. Within that 10-year period, I wonder what was being done to support the lumber industry as it was.

We heard from people who were before the international trade committee about the loss of market share during that 10-year period. It was not only due to the lack of negotiations, it was also due to the changing markets.

Between 2005 and 2009, there was a decline of 70% of the softwood lumber exports to the U.S. from the Atlantic provinces. There was a declining housing market. In addition, we heard from Duncan Davies, the president of Interfor Corporation, from British Columbia, who talked about the loss of market share to competing products. Within that 10-year period, the market changed. There was the introduction of competing products, such as steel composite and cement in the housing industry.

We have to have agreements in 2016, 10 years later, that reflect the changing market, not only on our side of the border, but also on the U.S. side, because it is looking to protect its own industry. We have to find an agreement that works best for both sides of the border.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the work she is doing with Standing Committee on International Trade. I understand that the committee travelled to Atlantic Canada this fall.

I wonder if the member could tell us of any feedback that she received from the industry in Atlantic Canada about trade, and specifically the upcoming agreement?

• (1745)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Speaker, we heard before the trade committee from Gaston Poitras, the chair of the Atlantic Lumber Producers, that more than 50% of the timber that is exported is actually from private land. That does make a difference. They do not want to see a change to that.

They also talked about the significance of the new survey methods that have been used in Atlantic Canada. Those survey methods are to keep track and collect data on the stumpage rates in Atlantic Canada. Also, we have evidence, if there is an opening of the agreement and the Maritimes are looked at being potentially part of tariffs and non-tariff issues, to suggest that we are well in compliance and we are not a subsidized industry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

We are running out of time here today. What worries me most are jobs. Time is also running out on the negotiations. The more time passes, the more our jobs are at risk. We are afraid that come January, February, or March, the Americans are going to impose another surtax on our industry.

I would like my colleague to tell us whether the government has planned any sort of mechanism to support the forestry industry so that it can overcome those challenges and prevent job losses.

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Speaker, certainly supporting any aspect of the softwood lumber industry is absolutely critical for this government, and I would say for everyone here in the House. I think we stand united, that we do not want to see job losses and that we also want to see the industry supported. We also want to see the industry supported with adaptability. A number of people before the international trade committee noted the importance of adaptability, of entering new markets, not being so dependent on one market, looking at how we need to diversify and become innovative. We had to do that in Atlantic Canada because of our heavy dependence on trade with the U.S. Certainly, it is a concern. Any time there are jobs lost in any of our communities, but especially in rural communities, it is extremely significant because of the ripple effect. We have seen in Atlantic Canada that so many families have moved from the east to the west to search for jobs and have not come back.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

We have often heard from the other side about agreements that have not been signed in the past 10 years. I would like to remind the government that it was our government actually, in 2006, shortly after being elected, that got the agreement done. It was a former lumber executive who came to the table and managed to get a deal done for Canadians. We have appreciated that work for the last 10 years. We have certainly seen renewals and extensions of the agreement, all based on that original success back in 2006.

Unlike what the government is trying to say, that the opposition when we were in government did not get it done, we actually got a lot done on the softwood lumber file. That kept communities, like my communities in Fort St. John, Mackenzie, and Fort Nelson, working in the lumber industry. Certainly, just with the downturn in the U.S. and the housing markets, all lumber-producing provinces across the country have had challenges.

I would like to clarify for the record that the previous Conservative government had a pretty good record when it came to softwood lumber, and trade deals specifically. That is why we are a bit concerned. We have seen negotiations where there is real progress. We had the former minister, the member for Abbotsford, get many trade deals signed while we were in government. We saw how much work it takes to get those deals done, when it was part of our mandate to get those deals done for the Canadian people so our trade and economy would be strong.

Business of Supply

However, when we do not see it as part of a mandate letter to the minister, or as part of a budget, we are concerned, because it is a significant file and a significant part of our community and economy in Canada. It is huge. We are talking about a potential loss of 400,000 jobs. That is massive. Four hundred thousand just sounds like a big number, but it is 400,000 individual people that provide roofs over their families' heads, meals on their tables, etc. These are real people we are talking about.

We were led to believe that this new relationship, which has been talked about many times, between the Prime Minister and the President was a good thing. Relationships with other leaders, especially our number one trading partner is a good thing. For Canadians out there in TV land, our number one trading partner is the U.S. and its number one trading partner is us. It is the largest trade agreement in the world, and we would like to keep it that way. Lumber is a significant part of that trade agreement.

We had high hopes, because it was talked about. I have an article from the CBC, dated March 12, 2016, which stated that Canada's international trade minister had said the Prime Minister's official visit to Washington helped secure a real breakthrough in the contentious softwood lumber negotiations. She said, "We have now managed to get the Americans to the table, we have managed to raise attention to this issue at the very highest levels".

There was an initial promise or high hopes that this new relationship was going to be much better and the deal was going to get done. That was back in March 12 of this year. We have all heard the quote, but I'll read it here. It says that the Prime Minister and President Obama "instructed [the minister] and her American counterpart, Michael Froman, to explore all options for solving the trade dispute and report back within 100 days."

That 100 days was some time ago. It was that high hope though that led us, especially as a member from British Columbia, to believe an agreement would be done. We knew the President was coming June 29. Typically, when two leaders come together in a place like this, that is the time when significant agreements are signed. Not just pictures are taken, but real, solid agreements are done.

● (1750)

I will read from a CBC article, and this is June 30 now. It said that the Prime Minister and the President "didn't say anything publicly about one of the toughest files in Canada-U.S. relations when they met in Ottawa Wednesday." It was strange, considering this new relationship that we hoped to benefit from in terms of a softwood lumber agreement. Our hopes really were dashed at that point, because it had been leading up to this crescendo where we would get this agreement signed. It was pointing to that. The 100 days would have fit and would have made that criteria fit with what they were trying to do.

However, what did we get? We actually have nothing now. As of October, we do not even have a pause anymore as to what was negotiated by the previous government. Now we are in a full softwood lumber trade war with the U.S., which is the last thing we wanted to see, especially going into an election in the U.S.

Therefore, it is not going to get better. Unfortunately, it is going to get worse before it gets better at this point. It is such a missed

opportunity. Everything could have been done June 30 or June 29 and signed when the President was here with the Prime Minister. It could have all been done to much fanfare from us in B.C. and across the country; alas, nothing.

This brings us to why we formed the softwood lumber task force. We had a press conference this morning. Critics in the portfolios here were at the event. Part of its mandate is that it is not clear that the government is taking this seriously in negotiating behind the scenes. It just is not clear. We do not know. Therefore, our softwood lumber task force has a mandate, which is that the task force will hold the Liberal government accountable for solving the softwood lumber trade dispute with the United States in order to preserve market access for Canadian forestry products and protect thousands of jobs across Canada. Further, it is going to involve two components: stakeholder outreach and policy advocacy.

First, my colleague for Cariboo—Prince George and I have been meeting with concerned constituents of ours who work in mills and who also own mills. It is the smaller players who are going to be dramatically affected by this. The bigger players seem to be hunkering down and getting ready for the storm. However, it is the smaller players. We would call them smaller, but they are still companies that have 400 to 500 jobs per mill. That is 400 to 500 families that are fed and housed all within the softwood lumber industry. We have heard that they are deeply concerned about where this is going to take us.

The second part of that is the policy advocacy. What we are looking to do is to form our own negotiations, I guess, or a set of concerns to put to the government to make sure that the government is doing what it should and negotiating properly. I think some of the comments we have made on our side when we stand up and critique the government are really telling. It was interesting to see, on a former resource project I had been asking the other side about in repeated questions, that it actually makes a difference. We saw the difference when the minister responded that the Liberals were going to answer one of our concerns with one of their announcements, and they mentioned some of the things I talked about.

We know that the task force has the ability to influence the government in its negotiations, and that is the purpose of it. The purpose is to positively critique the government so that we get a good agreement at the end of the day.

We do know that it affects Canadians across this country. Again, I speak for my constituents in Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, but it really affects colleagues of mine in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada. It is really right across the board.

Again, this is with the intent of getting a good agreement. Our task force will challenge the minister to do exactly that and get us a good agreement.

Business of Supply

• (1755)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies for talking about the task force that our party has announced it is going to have across this country to ensure that workers, industry, and all of the tertiary businesses that are tied to the forestry industry are having their say in how these negotiations go forward. It is critical that Canadians have a say in how the softwood lumber debate takes place, and how we inform the Minister of International Trade in dealing with the Americans.

I have to say that I continue to be somewhat apprehensive on whether or not the Liberal government will get this job done. We saw how the Liberals walked away from the Keystone pipeline and did not engage in any way, shape, or form in making that happen.

I would ask my colleague to talk about the concerns that he has had on the record that the current government has had in Canada-U.S. relations, especially when it comes to trade.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, yes, we have some deep concerns about agreements that were made and it was assumed were going to proceed, only to have a government over-regulate or step into the middle of the process and get in the way of good natural-resource projects.

The member brought up the tertiary industry. I always bring up the Starbucks coffee shop down the street from the mill, where everybody stops to get a coffee on the way to work. Those people will not have jobs as a result. Everybody is affected by the loss of jobs in the forest industry, especially in the forest capital of B.C., which is Prince George in my riding. The effects will be dramatic unless we get this deal solved.

Going back to what my colleague asked, the opportunity was there in June and it was missed. It was a perfect opportunity to sign the agreement when the President was in Ottawa and in the House. It would have been the perfect time to do it. Now, with the lead-up to the election, as we know, rhetoric gets more heated during this time and it is not looking good for us to get the agreement anytime soon.

• (1800)

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would simply like to remind him that when the Conservative government was in power, it cost the forestry industry \$1 billion.

We want a deal to be signed, but at what price? I hope it will not be on the backs of our workers or at the industry's expense.

In his speech, my colleague mentioned that they have formed a task force to meet with workers and representatives from the forest industry. Since the beginning of June, this industry has known that the government would not be able to negotiate a deal. What is the industry asking for now? It wants the government to work on a plan B, which could be a loan guarantee program, for example.

What are my colleague's thoughts on a loan guarantee program? Are they going to listen to the forest industry, given that this is what the industry now wants?

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I respect the member for asking the question about a loan type of program for the softwood lumber industry. That, to me, is one of the many issues that could be talked about in terms of what the deal finally looks like, but I find it awfully rich from the NDP.

We just talked about a Pacific NorthWest LNG announcement, of which the member who is from that riding was supportive. Then the NDP comes out and opposes the entire project when most of the member's constituents who work there would be employed through the LNG industry, yet the NDP wants to completely shut it down because of some ideological position.

To me, it is interesting that the New Democrats always talk as if they are pro-resource development, but they do not live by it. When it comes down to brass tacks, the NDP is not a resource-development positive party that promotes resource development in Canada. That is just the simple truth of it. It is sad, but let us hope that someday it will be the case that the NDP is a pro-resource development party.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak in favour of the opposition motion on the softwood lumber agreement, and more generally on Canada-U.S. relations. I want to congratulate my friend the international trade critic for bringing the motion forward. He is a former agriculture minister as well, someone who certainly knows the intricacies and complexity of the issue.

I want to start my remarks today by setting the stage about Canada-U.S. relations and then I will move specifically to the motion and softwood lumber within that.

Canada and the U.S. have an important and strategic military, political, and economic relationship. On the economic side, the Canada-U.S. trade relationship is the largest trading relationship in the world. In terms of economic volume, economic value, it is the largest trading relationship between nations in human history. Our trading relationship is facilitated by our shared democratic values and, obviously, a shared desire for prosperity and for working together to achieve that end.

While there is a lot there in terms of our shared values, there are substantial differences between the way our political systems work. The way in which we have to engage each other should reflect an understanding and appreciation of those differences.

Business of Supply

Canada as far as democracies go is a relatively centralized system within each level of government. We have a federal system, and provincial governments where a lot of power is exercised as well. With respect to the process of international deal-making, the federal government has the power to negotiate, to sign, and to ratify agreements, but it needs to engage the provinces on certain details that may touch on their jurisdiction. Effectively, our Constitution gives that power to the federal government. Unlike perhaps in the United States and other countries, if Canada signs a deal and the government is in favour of the deal, there is rarely any doubt, at least in a majority Parliament, about the deal not being ratified.

When we in Canada look at the situation in the United States, we can make the mistake of assuming that its system works exactly the same way, that the president is the only decision-maker involved. We know that the American system is very different and, therefore, to protect and advance Canada's economic interests, we really have to be engaged at all levels. We have to be engaged in a much wider and deeper way with the United States, not just with the president's administration.

We saw that under the previous government. We saw a real appreciation of the need for a depth of engagement that went not only across parties but also across individuals. We had a prime minister and ministers who were engaged in those relationships. Former MP Rob Merrifield worked as a legislative liaison person. He built relationships directly with legislators. We saw from that kind of negotiations and the kind of success we achieved generally that this approach paid substantial dividends. One example is country of origin labelling, which was basically at the finish line at the time of the last election. We achieved that success by working legislator by legislator, vote by vote, to build a consensus and the support we needed to advance Canada's position. That was an important part of the approach we took.

In addition to talking to legislators, especially in the context of the United States, we also have to be engaged in public discussion. We need leaders in this country who are prepared to speak to the broader global discussion, the public discussion, about the importance of trade, leaders who are willing to make public arguments in favour of the open economy.

We have heard the Prime Minister talk publicly at the United Nations and elsewhere about the success of Canadian pluralism, and I certainly applaud that. However, just as we agree with the principle of social and cultural openness, the open economy has been the foundation of our success. We need to be willing to speak in the international debate around that. We can speak about the benefits of international trade.

We see in the United States that the basic understanding of the value of the open economy is now up for debate. It is being attacked by people on different sides of the political spectrum. On the Republican side, a party historically in favour of free trade, the nominee is advocating tearing up most of the major trade deals already in place, but within the Democratic party on the other side there is some strong criticism of trade as well. We see this emerging anti-trade discourse and it is important that we have leadership in Canada that is prepared to talk about the value that trade has produced for both countries.

● (1805)

We are speaking today about a specific trade issue that is happening in a context in which American elites are questioning the broader value of trade. I think many of the elites understand the arguments in favour of trade at a deeper level, but they are being pushed and pulled away from these kinds of common-sense positions by certain political forces.

If we believe in the value of trade, one of those core principles of political discourse is that we cannot win an argument if we are not prepared to make it. Unfortunately, right now we do not have a Prime Minister who is prepared to stand up and make the arguments for the open economy. Whether it is being bold on the trans-Pacific partnership, actively prioritizing and addressing the softwood lumber issue, or talking about the larger benefits of trade in our relationship, it is a missed opportunity that we do not see this happening in the way and the degree to which it should.

Let us remember that, despite what we are hearing in the political discussion in the United States, all of the opinion data that I have seen suggests that many Americans at the ground level really understand and appreciate the value of the trading relationship. That is something that we can tap into. I have quoted these numbers in the House before. However, a recent Gallup poll found that only 33% of Americans view trade as a threat, down from a peak of 52% in 2008. That is a historic low in terms of Americans seeing the trade deal as a threat.

In general, the government's approach to the Canada-U.S. economic relationship has created some significant problems because the government has been unwilling to make those arguments for the open economy. We know where we stand. We know where the NDP stands. The government kind of blows in the wind when it comes to trade, but it has not been clear in terms of making these strong arguments.

We hear a lot of talk, especially on this issue. In this place, the Prime Minister used the word "bromance" and "dudeplomacy" when he was talking about the relationship with the United States, yet we do not see the use of that supposed relationship in advancing Canada's national interests. We should be using whatever cache we have there to advance the open economy and Canada's interests. Unfortunately, all of the evidence seems to suggest that this bromance is a bit one-sided and that the dudeplomacy is not happening and is not moving the results forward.

In the midst of this relationship, the Americans have not been shy about pushing forward their interests. The President spoke in this place about suggesting that Canada spend more on its military and that we support the trans-Pacific partnership, things that incidentally would probably be in Canada's interests as well. Therefore, it is important that we take advantage of the opportunity as well to advance our own interests in this relationship, that we are talking at a multi-dimensional level, that we are engaged with different levels, and that when the Prime Minister goes to Washington he brings the relevant ministers, such as the natural resource minister, not prioritizing the personal and glitzy parts of it but working to achieve results. If we had an emphasis on results, we would be further ahead on the softwood lumber deal.

Business of Supply

Many of my colleagues have spoken specifically about the importance of the softwood lumber industry. Canada's largest export market for softwood lumber is the United States, as 96% of all softwood lumber imports into the United States come from Canada. Therefore, it is a relationship that is important to Canada as well as the United States and it needs to be a focus. Rather than focus on the optics and the media spectacle parts of the relationship, we need the government to dig in deep and say that it is not just about one person, it is not just about photos and about the public niceties, but that it is about how we advance Canada's national interest.

If we look at the absence of the mention of softwood lumber in the Liberal platform, in the throne speech, and in the mandate letter for the minister, this is reflected in the way the government has acted. When we were in government, within three months the Conservatives had a deal in place. That was because our former prime minister always emphasized Canadian values as well as Canada's national interests in international relations. It was not about the spectacle part of it. It was only that to the extent that it made a difference to the lives, well-being, and prosperity of ordinary women and men here in Canada because that is the first job of the government. It is not to promote its own individual brand. The first job of the government is to advance the interests of Canadians.

That is what we need to be doing with respect to our relationship with the United States. We need to go deep. We need to engage multiple people. We need to focus on substance. It needs to be the kind of negotiation that for the people at home, the Marthas and the Henrys who are watching that discussion, things are happening that matter for them and make their lives better. That is where we should be focusing. That is why the motion is important.

• (1810)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for his debate, particularly his discussion on the nature of the Canada-U.S. relationship.

I was following most of his argument and actually agreed with a significant part of his thesis until you took that turn at the end and were critical of the current Prime Minister's use of his relationship with President Obama and then turned around and later said that the fact that we have this relationship and cannot get the deal done is somehow a failing on the part of the government.

I want to ask a more serious question about how we could deepen that relationship.

We recognize how complex this particular file is. Can you actually give us some concrete solutions and things that you think need to be in this particular agreement?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member did not mean me, the Speaker, telling him that. I am sure he meant the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify that I am not at all critical of the idea of having a warm relationship. Obviously, warm relationships, in terms of international diplomacy, can have positive effects on Canadian interests. The point is that it should not be an end in and of itself. The relationship between leaders should be a means for advancing Canada's national interests.

There has been much discussion about our relationship, yet when we do not see results in terms of the interests of Canada, it makes us wonder whether the relationship actually is what it is made out to be, or if it is, why we are not using that relationship in a way that reflects what should be the job of our leadership.

In terms of concrete ideas, my colleagues have proposed a number of different things. Part of the challenge we have is that the discussion is happening very much in secret. We have to sort of rely on assurances from the minister that we are doing this or doing that. What we can say from the outside is that this certainly needs to be a priority. The government should have been able to get a deal by now, looking at the results the Conservatives were able to achieve when we were in government. It is important also to get an update, at least, in terms of where we are going with it and then to hopefully see some movement forward.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to make a comment.

I do not believe that paying the Americans \$1 billion, at the expense of the Canadian industry, is indicative of a good Canada-U.S. relationship. We are not necessarily getting a better agreement if we have to pay money to the Americans. It is really the Canadian industry that had to pay for that. All the players, the workers, and the forestry industry agree that we are better off going before independent tribunals than ending up with a bad agreement. We know that they won and were recognized on three occasions. Accordingly, it is better to go before the courts than to have a bad agreement that will be detrimental to our industry and will cause job losses that will be disastrous to our economy.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan will have two minutes to answer that question when we resume debate on this topic.

It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 18, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that if you seek the consent of the House, we would agree to see the clock at 6:30 p. m.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[Translation]

PROTECTION OF PREGNANT WOMEN AND THEIR PREBORN CHILDREN ACT (CASSIE AND MOLLY'S LAW)

The House resumed from May 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-225, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (injuring or causing the death of a preborn child while committing an offence), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 37, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-225 under private members' business.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as tempted as I am to respond to my colleague on the issue of trade, that would not do justice to the important subject in front of us.

I want to again congratulate my colleague for bringing forward this important legislation, what we are calling Cassie and Molly's law, Bill C-225.

For those just joining the debate or watching, it is very important to underline what this bill would do and what it would not do. The bill would create a circumstance under which if a pregnant woman were attacked, killed, or assaulted, and her unborn child was harmed or killed in the process of that assault, then a separate offence would now exist under the criminal law which would punish the person who committed the offence for the attack on the unborn child, as well as on the mother. Punishment is not the core of it. The core of it is a recognition of the impact that this has on not just one, but on multiple people. That is what the bill would do.

It is very important to underline that the bill would only apply that offence in the case where another offence already exists. There is no possible way, under this legislation, and it is very well written and clearly put, in which a person could be charged for an offence against an unborn, preborn child if there were not also an offence against the mother.

I know that any time, in this place or elsewhere, we have this discussion that involves preborn, unborn children, there is a whole other debate that stirs in the minds of some people. However, because this only applies in the case where there is an offence against the mother, there is no possible way in which this bill could be twisted, or honestly there is no way in which it could be reasonably inferred to in any way inform a kind of legal change on an issue like abortion. It just is very clear there in terms of the way this bill operates.

If we were just isolating the question of the bill as it actually exists, I do not think anyone here would disagree with the principle, that when there is an offence against a mother and an unborn child, there is an impact, and two beings are involved. The suggestion by some members that we cannot pass the bill because it somehow, linguistically, indirectly, seems to invoke another controversy, I find unfortunate.

Obviously we know the question, for instance, of abortion is a challenging and divisive one. Can members who disagree on that question not come together on something that I think we should all agree on, which is combatting violence against women and which is the impact that this also has on another life.

I know some people object to the terminology. They do not like the term "unborn child" or "preborn child". They would rather use the word "fetus" or something else. My understanding is that fetus is just a Latin word for the same thing. I try to avoid Latin *ceteris paribus*, but it really does not matter what terminology is used.

The point is that we have legislation which is just eminently sensible, which responds to a reality that if a woman loses a child because she is attacked, that she feels that loss in a particular way. To suggest that she does not, to suggest that this, for the person who is attacked, is simply akin to another kind of assault, or to suggest that there is not an added impact or added element calling out for some kind of justice really ignores the lived experience and the testimony of people who have brought forward this issue, and who have said that this is a priority for them.

The bill is named after real people who have real experience with this, who have spoken to my colleague and to other members, who have asked that we respond to it in this way, and who have asked that, hopefully, we come together as a House, across party and ideological lines.

I would encourage my colleagues, if they are hearing different things about this bill from different places, to take the time to have a look at the legislation and decide for themselves.

● (1820)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to what is no doubt an important private member's bill. As other private members' bills come along, I acknowledge the efforts that members often put into their proposed legislation for a wide variety of reasons.

I have had the opportunity to go over this member's bill and have some serious concerns.

Often I stand in this place and talk about the importance of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I have argued in the past and I personally believe in the charter. The Liberal Party is a party of rights and freedoms. Listening to the member, I cannot help but reflect on that issue.

It is important to recognize that the government condemns all forms of violence against women, including pregnant women. We recognize that the criminal law must strongly condemn and hold fully accountable those who perpetrate violence against others, particularly those more vulnerable to violence.

Private Members' Business

When I think of our current legislation, it is important for us to emphasize a couple of aspects that are very germane to this debate. Subsection 223(2) and subsection 238 of the Criminal Code carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, which prohibits the causing of the death of a child who has not become a human being in an active birth under certain circumstances. Another aspect is to recognize that the Criminal Code contains comprehensive assault and homicide offences which apply to violent acts against pregnant women.

It is important to look at case law. One of the privileges I had serving as the justice critic in the Manitoba legislature for many years was to look at case law. What is being practised through our courts is important for all of us to take into consideration. Case law shows that abusing a pregnant woman and committing an offence is considered an aggravating factor for sentencing proposed and punished severely. That is a very important aspect that we need to take into consideration.

As I indicated, criminal law does take violence against women, including pregnant women, very seriously. The government believes that gender-based violence has no place in our society and we are committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy against gender-based violence. Canada's approach includes prevention, support for victims and the criminal justice responses.

I am not one to shy away from what I believe are very important issues. This chamber deals with a wide variety of issues that affect the lives of the constituents who we represent. I represent the riding of Winnipeg North. When I knock on doors, there are different issues that people bring up. However, one of the issues people want to talk about, no matter what their background, is the issue of crime and safety as a whole. It is an area of discussion that I genuinely appreciate and want to explore. I am constantly looking for ways in which we can improve communities in which we live.

I have articulated, whether it is at the door, or inside this chamber, or inside the Manitoba legislature, that individuals have a right to feel safe in the environments in which they live, the neighbourhoods and the communities. In some areas of Canada there are concerns.

•(1825)

I want to highlight a bit of that, given what I have already said about the private member's bill. I do think it is important for us, when we have the opportunity, to incorporate into the dialogue what we believe are important issues for our constituents.

That is why, when I look at Bill C-225, I somewhat understand why the member is bringing it forward, though I would tend to disagree. Ultimately I believe there are laws in place, which have been demonstrated through our court system, that have already taken into consideration some of the sensitivities that the member is attempting to bring forward within this legislation. I started by talking about the importance of the charter, and that is something which I believe also needs to be highlighted.

In having this discussion at the doors with my constituents, I believe that what I am reflecting in the House today is an honest reflection of what my constituents would want me to be saying. In addition, I would argue that there are other aspects of the criminal law that could be looked at and considered.

We have had a government in the past that tended to take an approach of getting tough on issues, getting tough on the issue of crime. Sometimes we need to recognize that our constituents want us to put more emphasis on getting tough on some of the causes of crime. This is something that we lose sight of at times. The member has brought forward a piece of legislation that caters to a specific issue that raises a number of other concerns that members might have. Let me suggest that the best thing we can do is to look at ways we can prevent abuse that is taking place against women, let alone pregnant women. We recognize that it does take place, and I suggest that one of the best ways we can prevent violence is to ensure we have the types of programs that will make a difference.

That means, for example, that we have to start working more with our different stakeholders, in particular our provinces and municipalities. Let me raise specifically the importance of our schools, through education and the role that school divisions play in establishing the curricula, for example. If we want to really have an impact on combatting domestic violence, as an example, we need to consider the role that our teachers and our social workers could play, whether they work for our municipalities or provinces. That is why, when we have legislation of this nature, it affords us to expand the debate to encourage the government of the day, which I happen to be a part of, and all members, to explore the ideas that would make a difference in preventing some of the abuse taking place in our communities. I suggest that if we put a higher priority on that issue in itself, we will better serve the constituents we represent. At the end of the day, this should be about making our communities safer and better places to live.

Do not misunderstand what I am saying. I truly believe that there should be a consequence for a crime that is committed. I sat as an honorary probation officer, as a chair of a youth justice committee, for many years, and I appreciate the importance of consequences to a crime. Specifically with respect to the bill we are debating today, I suggest that there are aspects that have been overlooked, in particular issues such as our current case law and how it has been taken into consideration. In particular, there are other aspects of our Criminal Code which do take it into consideration, and hopefully will provide some assurances to the member who is sponsoring the bill.

•(1830)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to shed light on a very important topic that is affecting individuals across Canada. The issue that I speak of is with regard to the Criminal Code of Canada and a crucial component that is in fact missing from it.

In current law, if an offence against a pregnant woman is committed, one charge can be laid, which is for the offence against the woman. Despite the fact that her preborn child may also have been injured or in fact killed in the altercation, the mother's loss of her child is not recognized in our current system.

Cassie and Molly's law, the proposed law that is before us today, is a direct response to pleas for justice, the pleas of moms and dads from across our country who have lost a preborn child to acts of violence committed against the mother.

Private Members' Business

I stand here today in full support of this piece of legislation. I recognize that there is a significant gap in the Criminal Code, which fails to protect pregnant women and their preborn children.

The private member's bill was introduced by my colleague, the member for Yorkton—Melville, in hopes of creating a reform that would better protect Canadian women and their families. Bill C-225, if it were to be brought into effect would establish a new offence for violent criminals who knowingly injure or cause death of a preborn child while committing a criminal offence against a pregnant woman.

Our current law, which does not recognize harm caused to a preborn, or even the death of a preborn, is absolutely unacceptable in Canada. Criminals are let off without any consequence for their violent actions against mothers who have chosen to have their children. Their actions are destructive and intentional, yet without due consequence. At this time, the firmest penalty for assaulting a woman is 14 years. With Bill C-225, two charges could be laid, one charge for the criminal offence against the woman, the mother; and the other charge for causing the injury or death of the child. The criminal would then face a maximum penalty of life in prison and a minimum penalty of 10 years under the new legislation.

The Criminal Code of Canada is missing a very critical component for protecting pregnant women. Through this new law, a legal device would be put in place that would improve the protection of women and recognize that safety is of utmost importance. Ultimately, it would fill a gap in the Criminal Code that would be a response to those who are seeking justice for their loss.

The bill was put forward as a result of one man's very tragic and very sad story. This man is Jeff Durham. Nearly two years ago, he suffered the heartbreaking loss of his partner Cassie and their daughter Molly. Cassie and Jeff were two individuals who chose to commit to being parents of Molly and who eagerly anticipated her arrival. On December 11, 2014, when Cassie was seven months pregnant, a man broke into her apartment and committed the unimaginable. As a result, both lives were taken that night, leaving Jeff without his child.

The man responsible was charged on several accounts, including first degree murder, break and enter, indecent interference with a dead body, arson causing property damage, possession of incendiary material for arson, and arson with disregard for human life. His crimes are absolutely disgraceful and no person should ever have to hear of their loved one facing this type of reality.

During the investigation, police have concluded that Cassie did not die from the fire but actually from severe blood loss due to trauma. Police have also stated that the crime scene was one of the most disturbing ones they had ever seen. Cassie was brutally murdered by a man who was well aware that she was pregnant and only weeks away from giving birth to her baby, Molly.

Jeff has expressed his thankfulness that the perpetrator was convicted of first degree murder, but he has also voiced his difficulty in finding comfort, as he feels that the charges do not properly represent Cassie's rights as a woman. Cassie made the choice to carry Molly to term. She made the choice to become a mother. Jeff made

the choice to become a father. However, that night they were robbed of that choice.

● (1835)

Canada is a nation that values human rights and equality. I am proud to live in this country that holds to these principles. However, our government has failed to acknowledge that the Criminal Code is missing a crucial component of protecting pregnant women and ultimately has turned a blind eye to this issue.

This piece of legislation is important in making our Canadian democracy stronger.

I am urging the government to stand by me and my colleagues, as well as by Jeff and his family and the millions of other Canadians who believe that this amendment is desperately needed.

This issue has gained overall support from both men and women from coast to coast to coast. According to a Nanos poll, it is suggested that 69% of Canadians are, in fact, in support of a law that would make it a separate crime to injure or cause death to a preborn while attacking a pregnant woman.

A study on the deaths of pregnant women determined that a pregnant or recently pregnant woman was more likely to be a victim of homicide than a woman who was not. This is a very scary statistic for families across Canada, and Canadians are looking for ways to ensure that they are kept safe.

The bill would protect women when they are at their most vulnerable, and it would protect a woman's choice to bring her child to term safely.

The bill is about protecting the most vulnerable among us and about taking a stand against violence, particularly violence against women. By passing Cassie and Molly's law, Canada's government would demonstrate that this issue is not taken lightly in our nation. It would serve as a strong statement concerning the value we place on women and their right to choose. The bill is about protecting families, it is about standing up for the rights of women, and it is about taking a stand against violence.

It was suggested earlier that the criminal law already takes violence against women very seriously. However, the problem Bill C-225 seeks to address is not that the Criminal Code fails to take violence against women seriously; it is that the criminal law does not take certain forms of violence perpetrated against women seriously enough. Specifically, I am talking about crimes committed against pregnant women, thus preventing their choice from becoming reality. That is unacceptable in the country of Canada, and it is time for us to take a stand.

Canada is a country that continually seeks to uphold the fundamental principles of justice. We value human beings and their lives, and we recognize that it is vital to continue striving to defend the people who live within our borders. Part of this is defending their freedom of choice. It is time for us to take a stand for pregnant women who have chosen to carry the beautiful hope that lies within them; that is, carrying a child to full term.

Private Members' Business

In closing, the charges that have been laid on the accused are insufficient and are an absolute injustice to Jeff, who is left without ever knowing his daughter Molly. Unfortunately, he will never be able to hold her or rock her to sleep or tell her that he loves her. What he is left knowing, however, is that Molly had a loving and caring family that was anxiously awaiting her arrival. Unfortunately, that day did not come.

It is extremely shameful that Molly's life is not accounted for in the charges against the accused.

Sadly, Jeff's story is one of many. He speaks on behalf of those who have experienced similar tragedy and injustice.

Going forward, we absolutely need this piece of legislation. We can no longer stand idly by when there are no consequences in place when a criminal knowingly injures or causes the death of a preborn while committing a criminal offence against a pregnant woman. This cannot be tolerated any longer. Canadians are looking to us in this place to take leadership with respect to this issue. They are looking to us to amend this gap. They are looking to us to make the tough call to protect freedom of choice and the well-being of humanity.

Canadians seek a safer environment for pregnant women and their preborns who are susceptible to the same kind of harm and violence that Cassie and Molly tragically endured.

I am calling on this House to support this piece of legislation on behalf of nearly 70% of Canadians who agree that we need this change.

• (1840)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today in this place and speak to Bill C-225, the protection of pregnant women and their preborn children act, Cassie and Molly's law.

To begin, I want to recognize and thank my friend and colleague, the member for Yorkton—Melville, for the good work she has undertaken in introducing this bill and for the passion she brings to this important debate.

As I have shared in this place before, I am the mother of four wonderful children, three of whom are married. I am also the grandmother of seven beautiful grandchildren, three of whom I have not met yet; one will be arriving next month and the other two just after the new year in January and February. Our entire family is eagerly awaiting their arrival. Nurseries are being prepared and books of the most popular names are being pored over. As grandparents, my husband and I can hardly wait to love them, spoil them, and then return them to their parents.

As my entire family prepares to welcome these three new members, the reality that this bill seeks to address is very near and dear to my heart. Let us talk about what this bill would do.

Bill C-225 would allow for two charges to be laid for causing the death of or injury to a preborn child while attacking a pregnant woman. One charge is for the offence against the woman, like assault or murder, which currently exists in the Criminal Code; and the other charge would be for the new offence that this bill would create for causing the death of or injury to the preborn child from the commission of the offence against the woman.

The bill would also give added protection to pregnant women, even in cases where the preborn child is not harmed or killed, because it would codify pregnancy as an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes. While judges can already treat pregnancy as an aggravating factor in sentencing, codifying it in criminal law would require a judge to always consider this factor in sentencing. Codifying pregnancy in criminal law is another way to more clearly and strongly denounce violence against pregnant women.

I cannot even begin to imagine the range of emotions that I would experience if one of my daughters or daughter-in-law, or my unborn grandchildren were harmed or killed by someone. If a woman has chosen to have a baby, should she not be entitled to justice if her unborn child is harmed or killed?

This bill would provide some justice. How would the bill do this?

Justice is not served when a person does not face any consequences for intentionally causing the death of or injury to a preborn child while attacking a pregnant woman. Bill C-225 is aimed at third parties who knowingly commit criminal offences against pregnant women.

The new offences are not standalone offences. They apply in a narrowly and precisely defined circumstance: only when a third party is committing or attempting to commit an offence against a pregnant woman knowing she is pregnant. The stiff penalties of a minimum of 10 years and maximum of life imprisonment for intentionally harming or causing the death of a preborn child would act as a strong deterrent against the commission of violence against pregnant women, since the offender cannot get to the child without going through the woman. In other words, if the child is protected, the woman is protected.

For the remainder of my time I would like to highlight what the bill could not do, contrary to what some have suggested.

This bill could not change the definition of a human being or create false personhood. The criminal law can be used to protect entities other than what is covered under the Criminal Code's definition of human being. The bill could not be used to criminalize doctors or anybody for performing abortions. Finally, the bill could not be used to criminalize pregnant women for any acts of commission or omission that may cause harm or death to her own fetus.

• (1845)

I want to quote the sponsor of Bill C-225, who was motivated to bring this bill forward after hearing Cassie and Molly Kaake's story. She stated:

The Criminal Code is missing a crucial component to protect Canadian women and their families. The increased penalties under Cassie and Molly's law create a legal mechanism that will enhance the safety of Canadian women and recognize the safety of their families. This approach is specific and robust. It is a common-sense approach designed to fill a gap in the Criminal Code that renders women and their preborn children vulnerable.

I would encourage all members in this place to take the time to read the bill and then support it, as it is clear in its aim, which is to protect the preborn in a very narrowly and precisely defined circumstance, when the woman has not chosen abortion, and a third party causes death or injury to her unborn child against her will.

Private Members' Business

To conclude, choosing to have a child is one of the most important commitments one will ever make. As a grandmother, I would share in the grief of my daughters and their husbands should anything like this ever happen to them.

Finally, as a member of Parliament, I have always and will always stand up for the rights of victims in the face of horrific crimes, and this bill would do that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill C-225. I want to thank my colleague from Yorkton—Melville for tabling the bill. I also want to thank previous speakers who have spoken so eloquently from their hearts.

Over 63,000 pregnant Canadian women were victims of spousal violence between 2004 and 2009. Since 2000, 24 pregnant women have been murdered. The bill is needed to fill a gap in the Criminal Code that is leaving pregnant women vulnerable.

As the law currently stands, women and families who are violated by those who abuse pregnant women have no recourse in law. Only one set of charges can be laid, but two lives have directly felt the impact of the crime.

The bill would create new offences for injuring or causing the death of a preborn child while committing a criminal offence against a pregnant woman when the person knows she is pregnant. This would allow for two charges to be laid when someone attacks a pregnant woman, and as a result kills or harms her preborn child. In current law, only one charge can be laid and that is for the offence against the woman, because injury or death of the child is not recognized.

When an individual receives no punishment for knowingly harming or killing a preborn child through an intentional act of violence against the child's mother, justice has not been served.

Bill C-225, the protection of pregnant women and their preborn children act, would allow two charges to be laid under such circumstances and includes an amendment to paragraph 718.2(a) of the Criminal Code, which would require the courts to consider pregnancy as an aggravating factor when sentencing those convicted of violence against women.

Cassie and Molly are remembered together. Their names have become known in households across Canada. While this acknowledgement and recognition of the heinous crime committed against both Cassie and Molly lends itself to a small measure of justice, justice has not been fully realized. Where two lives full of hope and promise were horrifically ended, only one murder charge stands. Molly matters.

There is no pro-life versus pro-choice debate. The choice has already been made. Molly's arrival was eagerly anticipated by her mother Cassie, her father Jeff, and countless other family members and friends.

Over the past 10 years, as I have served as a member of Parliament, one of the services I and all members of Parliament offer to our constituents in this chamber is to present petitions on their behalf. Over the past months and in fact years, petitioners from my riding and all across Canada have flooded my office and the offices

of my colleagues, pleading to be heard, begging for action on this crucial issue.

I have heard them loud and clear. We need to fix this gap in the legislation and right the wrong that Cassie and Jeff have to endure. It is true that nothing will bring back the lives of Cassie and Molly, but we can take a stand for parents who have made the choice to welcome a baby into their family and have that choice taken away by violence.

A large majority of Canadians agree with the intent of Bill C-225. In fact a Nanos poll commissioned by the creator of the legislation found that 69% support or somewhat support a law that would make it a separate crime to harm or cause the death of a preborn child while attacking a pregnant woman, versus 21% who oppose or somewhat oppose such legislation.

The Prime Minister has, on several occasions, labelled himself a feminist. If that is true, I look forward to his support of the legislation as over 70% of women support these protections.

The bill would directly act as a deterrent against the abuse of women and their preborn children. The bill would add pregnancy to the list of aggravating factors for sentencing purposes. Although judges can already treat pregnancy as an aggravating factor, codifying it in the criminal law is a way to more clearly and strongly denounce violence against pregnant women.

We know from researching case law that it is often unclear to what extent a woman's pregnancy is considered in sentencing. The bill would send a strong message to the courts that pregnancy must now be considered in the sentencing hearing.

● (1850)

Pregnant women are four times more likely than other abused women to report having experienced a very serious violence, including being beaten, choked, threatened with a gun or knife, or sexually assaulted. This legislation would act as a strong deterrent against committing violence to pregnant women because of the increased penalties it would carry for intentionally causing the death of a preborn child.

Molly's story reminds me of an incident that occurred close to my riding in London, Ontario. Last year, at a Costco parking lot, a woman unintentionally drove into the entrance directly hitting a family of four. The family of four was torn apart by the immediate death of a six year old and the death of a baby who was born a week after the incident. Complications arising directly from the accident caused the subsequent death of the baby.

The results of this case may not have changed as a result of Cassie and Molly's law, however, the very real reaction from the victims' grandfather and other family members show the emotional heartache they felt, whether one had met or were waiting in eager expectation to meet a child. As I said, this case was an accident. How much more pain would the family be going through today if the perpetrator had carried out this offence intentionally.

Private Members' Business

Listening to the debate this evening and following it previously, it is clear that those who oppose this legislation want to make it about opening the abortion debate. This could not be more wrong. This is not about reopening the abortion debate. No part of this legislation could do that. The bill could not be used to criminalize doctors or any physician for providing abortion. Neither does it change the definition of human being nor give fetus personhood.

The bill would protect the preborn child in a very narrowly and precisely defined circumstance when the woman had not chosen to abort and a third party knowingly caused death or harm to the preborn child against the mother's will. As stated earlier, the bill would close a serious gap in the Criminal Code. When two lives full of hope and promise are intentionally and violently ended, it is simply common sense to expect that our laws would send a strong deterrent message, standing against the abuse of women and their preborn children.

Tonight and previously we have heard our Liberal colleagues say, "gender-based violence has no place in society". If that really is true, if my Liberal colleagues really believe that, I ask them to stand up against gender-based violence and support Bill C-225.

• (1855)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Cassie and Molly's law, Bill C-225.

Canadians want fairness. Canadians want justice. This is a prime example of an opportunity to provide that justice in Canada.

A piece of legislation called the unborn victims of crime act was presented to a previous Parliament, and that Parliament decided that it was an issue worthy of debate. The bill was about to go to committee at second reading, but unfortunately time ran out and that Parliament ended. That piece of legislation was put forward by former member of Parliament Ken Epp. We now have a new piece of legislation. It is similar, but it has been refined to clarify that this is not about abortion but about justice. I strongly believe that Canadians would like this legislation to at least be sent to justice committee.

For clarity, in the House, it is a rarity for a member of Parliament to be given a number at the beginning of Parliament. That number stands for the order of precedence for presenting a private member's bill. The member who introduced this legislation was given the unique opportunity of getting a low number. There is a connection too. She respected Ken Epp, and she remembered the time when his bill was almost sent to committee. She now finds herself representing her community and being given the honour and privilege of presenting her private member's bill. It was laid on her heart. She heard the story about Jeff Durham and the tragic loss of his partner, who was carrying their preborn child Molly. They were excited. For him to lose both his partner and his little girl who was yet to be born was tragic. Molly would have been born just a couple of months later.

Jeff wants justice. Canadians want justice. I believe strongly that the majority of us here in Parliament would agree that Jeff Durham deserves the opportunity to go to justice committee and tell his story and why he believes we need changes in the Criminal Code of Canada. At this point in time, the Criminal Code does not recognize the loss of Molly, but it does recognize the loss of Cassie.

The government has said that it is opposed to all forms of gender violence. This is its opportunity to allow the bill to go to committee. The vote will be happening shortly on second reading. Traditionally, a private member's bill is a free vote. I would hope that the Prime Minister would allow justice, would allow fairness, would allow transparency, and would allow victims of crime in Canada the opportunity to have a voice in this Parliament. That will only happen if members of the Liberal majority government give Mr. Jeff Durham and others the opportunity to come to committee and speak. If the Liberals vote against Bill C-225, it will end. The bill will die, and justice and fairness will not be served.

I cannot dream what it would be like to experience the loss that Jeff Durham and his family have experienced. He has the moral right to stand before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. This Parliament has been set up exactly for examples like this. To cut the process short would be a travesty of justice.

• (1900)

If, after hearing from a victim at committee, the government still considers that C-225 should not be supported, that would be their opportunity to vote against it. However, to cut it short before victims have a chance to speak about their losses and why they strongly believe that the Criminal Code needs to be changed and improved is not transparent, is not open, and is not inclusive.

This is a test for this Parliament. This Parliament is a majority Parliament. The Liberal Party of Canada and the Prime Minister have a majority in this House. This is their opportunity to do the right thing. I trust that they will. They have said that they will not support this. I believe they should have an opportunity to reconsider and allow Jeff Durham and others to come to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Removing that opportunity would leave a very unfortunate message, which is that only certain people and certain issues will have an opportunity for justice, and only certain issues will the government listen to and consider.

Is this an opportunity to listen and allow victims to have a voice? I believe so. This is a prime example. I ask the government, and particularly every member in this House, to allow Jeff Durham and his family to have a voice, a voice to call for justice, a voice to call for an amendment. I ask the House to please allow justice to prevail in this land.

Canada is known as a country where one is treated fairly. One can accomplish whatever he or she wants with hard work and commitment. This is an opportunity for the House to show its true colours, its true colours of justice, fairness, and respect for the law. The world watches things like this, as do our children.

Private Members' Business

This is a political House, yet it is a partisan House at times. This is also an opportunity to lay aside partisan issues and do the right thing. Each of us is here for a short period of time. We will look back at our time here and do some soul-searching and wonder if we did the right thing. Maybe we do not always do the right thing.

This is an issue of conscience. It has been made very clear that this would not reopen the issue of abortion. It is whether the victims should have the right to share their experience, the travesty they went through. Would that be part of a healing process? I hope so. Hopefully this House will not deny justice being done.

● (1905)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to close the second hour of debate on my private member's bill, Cassie and Molly's law. This bill is in response to the 2014 murder of Cassie Kaake in Windsor, Ontario, when Cassie was weeks away from giving birth to their daughter Molly. In Canada, there is no component in the Criminal Code to protect pregnant women from violence. This gap is leaving women vulnerable. Cassie and Molly's law would address this specific issue to protect pregnant women and their future families.

Since introducing this legislation in February, I have been inspired by the support of Canadians across the country for Cassie and Molly's law through a flood of letters, phone calls, emails, and meetings with everyday Canadians who know both Cassie and Molly deserve justice as do all the women who have been victims of violence while pregnant.

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime endorse Cassie and Molly's law because it is justice for victims of serious crime. The Native Women's Association of Canada has endorsed Cassie and Molly's law because this bill is one step closer to justice for at least 18 of the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Canadians want this legislation.

In a nationwide poll by Nanos Research in which 97 respondents identified as pro choice, nearly 70% of Canadians were supportive of this legislation. Support among women was even higher at 75%. Canadians understand what this bill would do and, just as important, they understand what the bill would not do.

The bill would create new offences for injuring or causing the death of a pregnant woman's preborn child while committing or attempting to commit a criminal offence against the woman. These offences are not stand-alone offences. The new charges under Cassie and Molly's law would only apply when a person was committing or attempting to commit a criminal offence against a pregnant woman. In addition, charges could only be applied when the offender had the knowledge that the female victim was pregnant.

The new offences are called causing the death of a preborn child while committing an offence or injuring a preborn child while committing an offence. With this law, two charges could be laid in crimes involving attacks on pregnant women that resulted in the harm or death of their preborn children: one in relation to the criminal offence against the woman, and the second charge in relation to one of the new offences either causing the death of or the injury to the preborn child.

Cassie and Molly's law would also add pregnancy to the list of aggravating factors for sentencing purposes. Codifying it in criminal law is a way to more clearly and strongly denounce violence against pregnant women. While the government suggests that courts consistently recognize pregnancy as an aggravating factor, I want members to know, from deeply researching case law, that it is often unclear to what extent a woman's pregnancy is considered in sentencing.

Opponents of Cassie and Molly's law claim that the bill could be a back door to limit a woman's access to abortion services. This is untrue and entirely misleading to Canadians. Simply put, Cassie and Molly's law would only add new offences for existing crimes against a pregnant woman that resulted in injury or termination of her pregnancy.

Because this bill would only affect existing crimes, and abortion is not criminal, Cassie and Molly's law would have no impact on abortion services. The bill would not change the legal definition of a human being or create fetal personhood as some critics have tried to claim. The constitutional experts at the leading firm, Supreme Advocacy, which the government highly respects, confirm that Cassie and Molly's law would have no impact on abortion laws. In fact, I would challenge the justice minister or the minister's representative in the House of Commons right now to present legal arguments that refute the expertise of these lawyers. Addressing violence against pregnant women is the strict and sole objective of the bill.

The government promised a strategy to combat gender-based violence. We are still waiting. Right here, right now we have an opportunity for a Liberal government and every member of Parliament to take a step toward reducing gender-based violence in Canada. Members of Parliament are here to serve Canadians, and Canadians have made their voices heard, loud and clear. They support this bill.

This is the proof: an e-petition with 6,100 signatures; paper petitions, over 20,000-plus; letters; emails; and phone calls reflecting all ages, men, women, expectant mothers, pro-choice supporters, victims, and those left to mourn. The Nanos Research poll confirming 70% of Canadians cannot be denied. Canadians across the great country support Cassie and Molly's law, and they expect the House to do the same.

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion 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 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 19, 2016, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, veterans who signed up to serve our country before Canada entered the Afghanistan mission signed up with the understanding that should they become injured during their service, they would be able to rely on a lifetime pension to ensure that they and their families would be taken care of by their country. However, the Liberal government of the day changed the rules and these men and women were sent into combat with no such protections. Some of those veterans took the government to court, calling on the sacred obligation we owe to veterans, to underscore the promises made by many governments to our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. This includes a financial obligation of a lifetime pension.

The previous Conservative government callously decided to fight those veterans in court, denying their rights and costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in an effort to refute the idea that we owe our veterans a sacred obligation for putting their lives on the line in defence of our country and the missions we ask them to undertake.

In 2015, the House of Commons unanimously passed an NDP motion that recognized Canada's covenant of moral, social, legal, and financial obligations to all veterans. Every member of the House agreed that we did, indeed, owe this sacred obligation to our veterans. Many of those members still serve in this place. Yet here we stand today in the same place as we were in 2012, with the current Liberal government back in court fighting those we pledged

to protect, our veterans and their families, and veterans are begging the government to recognize the sacred obligation they are owed.

To add insult to injury, the Liberals have even hired the same lawyer, Paul Vickery, who was contracted by the Conservatives to fight this case. It is the same lawyer, the same situation, the same lawsuit that Liberals denounced in the House not so long ago, and I am wondering why. The Liberals made their commitment to veterans very clear just a year ago in their platform, which states:

Veterans and their families have earned our respect and gratitude. It is time our government lived up to its sacred obligation to them. Our plan will give back to those who have given so much in service to all Canadians, and will ensure that no veteran has to fight the government for the support and compensation they have earned.

My simple question is this. Why is the government, despite campaigning a year ago with the promise to respect veterans, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting wounded veterans in court instead of spending that money to ensure that those veterans receive the benefits and services they require, the benefits and services to which they are entitled?

•(1915)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was with great pride that I had the privilege of serving in the regular forces for a number of years and had the opportunity to march with veterans on many special occasions, and I am very happy with the way this government has been addressing this very important file.

Allow me to provide the member with a more formal response by stating that with any issue in this place, it is important to represent all the facts accurately.

I will point out that this lawsuit began years ago. Like her, I find it deeply regrettable, and I know that the minister does as well, that veterans felt that they had to take the previous government to court to ensure their own well-being.

While we would rather the plaintiffs were not still pursuing this avenue, we acknowledge their right to do so. That said, our government is working to address the issues raised in this court case. It is precisely because of this situation that the Minister of Veterans Affairs was given the strong mandate to restore access to services for veterans and to ensure long-term financial security and independence for disabled veterans and their families.

I would like to point out that the mandate letter addresses most of the concerns laid out in this lawsuit, including the option of a lifelong pension. We are committed to delivering on that mandate and to getting it right in a timely manner, not getting it wrong quickly.

When it comes to veterans' financial security, this government is not backtracking. Budget 2016 delivered \$5.6 billion in additional financial security for veterans.

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We invested \$2.6 billion to increase the earnings loss benefit. The ELB is a temporary income replacement to support a veteran financially through physical rehabilitation, vocational retraining, and counselling. Under the previous government, a veteran received 75% of his or her pre-release salary. With budget 2016, that benefit increased to 90%. These changes came into effect October 1, 2016.

In addition, the permanent impairment allowance was changed to better address veterans' individual needs. Renamed the career impact allowance, it will see each veteran's injury or impairment assessed individually instead of having their situation fit into a predefined category. This will better determine the impact an impairment might have on a veteran's career advancement opportunities. These changes come into effect next April 1.

The third benefit to be improved and enhanced in budget 2016 is the disability award, a tax-free payment that recognizes the pain and suffering a service-related disability causes in one's life. As of April 1, 2017, the maximum disability award payment will rise from \$310,000 to \$360,000. Those already receiving a disability award will receive a top-up backdated to April 2016.

We deliberately packaged these improvements together to help veterans and their families get ahead by putting money in their pockets now and ensuring that no one falls through the cracks.

When military service is prematurely ended, we are determined to do all we can for our courageous men and women in uniform. We are actively engaging veterans and veterans' organizations to hear directly from them. The minister established six advisory groups and held three stakeholder summits, including one that concluded two weeks ago, as part of his commitment to improve transparency and seek consultation on issues of importance to veterans and their families.

This is, indeed, a very important issue and has been for this government since day one, and even when we were in opposition. The entire Liberal caucus stands behind our veterans, and we will do what we can to support them.

• (1920)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, we have heard over and over about the minister's mandate letter and the promises that have been made.

We have seen a slow trickle of some of the promises, a slow reopening of some Veterans Affairs offices, and some additional money for injured veterans, but nothing of the promised pensions or the significant reforms that are desperately needed.

Veterans are falling through the cracks. Those cracks are deep, and our veterans are not getting the help they need.

Will the government live up to its sacred obligation to all veterans and ensure that they, no matter when they served, receive the services and benefits they are entitled to? Will the government support a one-veteran-one-standard approach and work quickly to make the necessary changes so that no one falls through the cracks?

Will it abandon this disgraceful lawsuit?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, since he was named to the post last year, the minister has held three stakeholder summits to hear

directly from veterans, their families, and veterans' organizations on this and other important issues, and to work toward the best way to deliver on his aggressive mandate in a way that would work best for them. Veterans want us to get the pension issue right. They told us they want to be consulted and to work with us to find a better solution. We are doing just that.

The minister has been clear, as has the Prime Minister. Canadian veterans will receive the quality benefits and services to which they are entitled. They will be treated with the care, compassion, and respect their service and sacrifices have earned them.

As I indicated, I had the privilege of marching with many veterans when I served in the regular services. I believe the government is on the right track in making sure our veterans are getting the services they require and justly deserve.

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to bring back a question to the government relating to disaster assistance in northern Saskatchewan. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the shortfalls that northern remote communities live through have been going on for far too long.

Communities are neglected. Their resilience is inspiring me to be here and to speak out. To show children, the elders, and their communities that they matter, we must make sure that they are treated with respect and are provided with the appropriate attention and resources. This means investing in adequate mental health services and cultural activities. It also means investing in the broader sphere, including complementary infrastructure such as roads, energy systems, broadband connectivity, and what we are here to talk about today, disaster assistance to mitigate the effects of natural and/or climate change related disasters.

I stood in the House a few months ago as a fire was inching its way into Saskatchewan from Fort McMurray. I asked the government about the kind of support it had offered to communities like Buffalo River, Clearwater River, and La Loche, to name a few. These communities were being affected by low air quality and were increasingly concerned about the spread of the fire in Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, I have not received a reassuring response from the government.

Maybe not many people know this, but northern Saskatchewan is a region where the effects of global warming stand out all too often. Northern trappers, hunters, fishermen, farmers, and harvesters are well aware of climate change and are very concerned with the affects it brings. They should also be part of the solution.

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One major example among many others is the increase in wildfires. Climate change is leading to higher temperatures and drier conditions, which make the sky ripe for dry lightning. Professor Toddi Steelman, a leading expert in the country on wildfires, stated that communities living near forests will have to learn how to coexist with fire better because she thinks this is what we are going to see in the near future.

In the summer of 2015, northern Saskatchewan experienced a horrible wildfire. Residents are still living with its effects today. This last summer, several fire bans were issued across the region because of the high risk.

The 2015 annual forest fire assessment by Natural Resources Canada says a warming climate will contribute to a 50% increase in large fires, new tree diseases, and more insect infestations. Although scientists say it is difficult to link any single natural disaster, such as a flood or fire, to man-made global warming, the frequency and intensity of such events has been increasing and is likely to continue, especially in a northern country like Canada.

Saskatchewan saw fires burn three times its 10-year provincial average area. Scientists agree that this reality should motivate concern and activity to better prepare over the coming decades to reduce the impacts of global warming. In the meanwhile, communities need to feel they can manage the effects of global warming.

Saskatchewan is prone to more disasters. Northerners want to know if they can count on their federal government to be prepared for assistance when difficult situations arise. First, I would like the minister to inform us about the disaster assistance efforts that were provided, particularly to the communities who were affected by the wildfire this summer in my riding.

Second, how is the government going to invest its community infrastructure and training budget to ensure that in the long run communities will be better equipped and trained to mitigate the effects of such natural disasters?

• (1925)

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the opportunity to address the concerns raised with respect to wildfire preparedness in Saskatchewan and the government's commitment to providing disaster assistance for the Fort McMurray wildfire and the surrounding areas, including areas on reserve.

The Fort McMurray fire affected over 580,000 hectares of land, not only in Alberta but also in Saskatchewan. This devastating wildfire resulted in approximately 90,000 people being evacuated and 2,400 structures destroyed. However, I am grateful to say that because of the courage and bravery of the first responders, there were no casualties directly resulting from the fire.

Emergency management in Canada is a shared responsibility between all levels of government. While provinces and territories manage actual firefighting resources on the ground, each year the federal government develops a seasonal wildfire risk assessment and corresponding contingency plan. The plan guides the federal

government in preparing for and responding to any potential requests for federal assistance.

The Government Operations Centre, housed in Public Safety Canada, monitors events on a 24/7 basis, and issues notifications and situation reports, as well as creates dedicated event teams when fire activity becomes significant, as it did for Fort McMurray.

The Government of Canada was engaged from the outset to ensure a coordinated response and deployment of the appropriate federal resources and assets. Throughout the events in Fort McMurray, the Government of Canada provided a great deal of support to the province of Alberta in an effort to limit the impacts on Fort McMurray and the surrounding communities.

For example, the Government of Canada, working with the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, facilitated a request for additional resources by the province of Alberta in the form of domestic and international firefighting personnel and equipment. Key federal departments coordinated this request to ensure that over 500 international firefighters from the United States, South Africa, and Mexico, arrived without delay. These additional firefighting resources, combined with favourable weather conditions, allowed for a more efficient response to the fire, preventing further risk to additional communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Every fire season, the federal government monitors fire activity throughout the country and assesses the impact of specific fire activity on communities, critical infrastructure, and the national interest. Should any province request federal assistance, the Government Operations Centre will efficiently and expeditiously fulfill the request and lead a coordinated response on behalf of the federal government, as was the case with the Fort McMurray wildfire.

The Government of Canada is reviewing its response throughout the 2016 wildfire season and incorporating lessons learned from the Fort McMurray event into its forward planning activities.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate the concern about the long-term effects of global warming on the everyday lives of northerners. This includes first nations communities, rural municipalities, farming communities, and small towns.

Scientists are warning us about what the future holds for us. While efforts to mitigate global warming are necessary, the government must also be ready to assist residents in remote communities by providing them with the appropriate disaster assistance, training, and infrastructure.

My constituents are counting on their government to meet their needs to mitigate the effects of wildfires and other natural disasters. Our elders, knowledge keepers, and communities are eager to provide their suggestions to reduce the negative impacts of global warming.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, supporting communities affected by forest fires and other emergencies is a top priority for the Government of Canada, as evidenced by our continuing support for the residents of Fort McMurray and surrounding areas, including areas on reserve.

At the same time, Public Safety Canada and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada are working together to provide funding for eligible off and on-reserve response and recovery expenditures. Through these joint efforts all communities are supported in terms of response and recovery.

I want to acknowledge the incredible efforts of the first responder community in responding to this event. Without this tremendous effort, the impacts could have been much worse and more widespread.

The Government of Canada continues to work closely with our provincial and territorial partners to monitor forest fires across the country to ensure that we are collectively ready to respond when called upon.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:31 p.m.)

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