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(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 27, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 27, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you were to seek it, I believe you would find that there is unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Timmins—James Bay, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, November 1, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Hochelaga 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)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and the usual arrangements among the parties, and I believe that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, presented to the House on Wednesday, October 5, be amended by replacing the first paragraph of page 9 with the following: "They might be facing refoulement, forced return to their country of origin, or they may be detained, but refugees are not simply supposed to be detained because they are refugees".

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

PETITIONS

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of citizens in my riding are very concerned about the state of palliative care and hospice care.

They are suggesting that the federal government recognize its importance and make specific accommodations for it.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again in this House to present a petition on behalf of the hard-working and dedicated constituents of Shawnigan Lake.

The petitioners are asking for the federal government to provide some assistance in combating the situation of a contaminated soil dump in their watershed.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP) moved:

That the House call on the government to comply with the historic ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordering the end of discrimination against First Nations children, including by:

(a) immediately investing an additional \$155 million in new funding for the delivery of child welfare that has been identified as the shortfall this year alone, and establishing a funding plan for future years that will end the systemic shortfalls in First Nations child welfare;

Business of Supply

(b) implementing the full definition of Jordan's Principle as outlined in a resolution passed by the House on December 12, 2007;

(c) fully complying with all orders made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and committing to stop fighting Indigenous families in court who are seeking access to services covered by the federal government; and

(d) making public all pertinent documents related to the overhaul of child welfare and the implementation of Jordan's Principle.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to open this debate this morning to put an end to the systemic and racist discrimination against indigenous youth in Canada. However, I am very troubled by the fact that we had to force a debate in the House of Commons to get the government to recognize its legal obligation to comply with the historic ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

The Prime Minister is also the Minister of Youth, and he told Canadians that renewing the relationship with the first nations was a priority for him. Unfortunately, the government continues to drag its feet when it comes to complying with the tribunal's ruling, even though it was ordered to take immediate action. The government has ignored orders twice since the ruling was handed down. What part of "immediate" does the Prime Minister not understand?

Because of this government's lack of due diligence, Parliament now has the duty to call on the government to honour its legal obligations regarding the welfare of children who continue to suffer because of a broken, underfunded system.

All across the country, young indigenous children are dying of despair every day. They go to schools that are underfunded, they have inferior health care services, and they are suffering the consequences of this government's broken promises.

What nation crushes the hopes and dreams of children? As a nation, our best resource is the potential of our children. The days of racism and systemic discrimination must come to an end. Reconciliation is not just a word. Reconciliation must become a reality.

[*English*]

I am very proud to rise in this House. What we are discussing today is about the choices we make as a nation, about the legal obligation, but above all it is about the children. I want to note that yesterday in the Manitoba legislature there was a unanimous condemnation of the government's refusal to respond to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

I want to pay tribute to 13-year-old Garrett Tomagatick from Fort Albany, who gave up hope this week and died. I want to thank the Canadian Rangers who were there at his funeral, because they do so much good work in our region. I think of the three others we lost in Fort Albany alone just this year, that beautiful little community. I think of the four in north Saskatchewan. I think of Sheridan Hookimaw, who was ground into hopelessness, and her death touched off the Attawapiskat crisis. We have seen 700-plus children try to kill themselves since 2009 in my region.

We have talked in this House about suicide and it is not specifically the issue of the day, but it is the public manifestation of the hopelessness and the failures that we can trace back through the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling to the systemic racist discrimination against children in every area of public service that they are entitled to. I am heartbroken that we even have to stand in

this House and force a debate on this issue, because we are talking about compliance with the law.

I think of, this past week, the story of Chanie Wenjack and Gord Downie that has opened Canadians' eyes to reconciliation. But there are hundreds of thousands of Chanie Wenjacks across Canada trying to find their way home now; trying to find their way home to hope, trying to find their way home to identity, and the 163,000 Chanie Wenjacks who want to come home to their families and are in a broken and badly underfunded child welfare system.

When the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found in January that the government was guilty of systemic and racist discrimination against children, it shone a light on that broken system, and the tribunal ordered immediate money to be put into that underfunded system. What the government responded with in March was its budget, in which it promised \$71 million. When the shortfall was over, \$200 million had been identified. The current government that spent \$7 billion this past summer on flagpoles, tennis courts, and good-time announcements could not find the money to meet its legal requirements to keep children protected.

• (1015)

Then we find out that the government actually never even bothered to respond to the compliance orders. It simply brought forward numbers that had been put together by the department of Indian affairs in the dying days of the last government. It says it responded to the tribunal, but no; it continued to ignore it.

What does this mean for children on the ground? There have been more than 2.6 million sleepless nights for children who have been away from their families since the tribunal ruling. There are stories that connect the broken child welfare system to the hopelessness and deaths of children. Tina Fontaine was taken from her family and found in a bag in a Winnipeg river.

We think of Azraya Kokopenace of Grassy Narrows, whose little brother died from mercury poisoning. One of the effects of mercury is depression, apparently, so she ended up needing help, but the broken child welfare system did not help her and her family. It put her into foster care. The poor little girl ended up on the streets, dealing with police; she was put in a hospital one night with no oversight or adult to look after her; she walked out and they found her body later.

It is said that a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. How do the hearts of women end up on the ground? It is when their children are taken. That was what the white conquerors figured out first off, and it is happening today. I talked to a mother the other day, who asked, "How do I sleep at night when I don't know where my babies are?"

We learned recently, in British Columbia, that there are horrific levels of sexual abuse against children in the child welfare system, the vast majority of them indigenous children. In Alberta, studies show that more than 741 children in the child welfare system died between 1999 and 2003, the vast majority of them first nation children.

Business of Supply

Raven Sinclair told the *Calgary Herald* there was nothing accidental about these shocking deaths. She said, “There are an incredible number of kids dying in care each year. This isn’t just an accident. It is not a fluke of statistics. It is happening year after year”.

The other thing that was ruled on was Jordan's principle. We voted in the House for the principle for Jordan River Anderson, the little boy who died in the hospital and never got home because the feds and the province argued about jurisdiction. The House passed a motion saying that all first nation children should be eligible for medical services, and the government is now at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal arguing about what that means. It is saying it will agree to pay for treatment for children who are badly handicapped on reserve, but not other children, and it will continue to fight.

What does that look like to children? I will give the example of Pictou Landing First Nation, in 2011, almost bankrupting itself trying to fight to get home care for a badly handicapped little boy. The government's case was thrown out because the justice recognized that the government had supported Jordan's principle, so it could not actually deny this child care. The government appealed it and actually wanted the family to pay its court costs.

We saw, through the tribunal, the ruling in internal documents in 2012, about a child who needed a special bed to keep from suffocating. Health Canada wrote on the report “Absolutely not”, and the doctor had to pay for it.

The new government is saying it will deal with those cases; it will accept the ruling and remain in compliance. However, other children will continue to be denied. On the very day that this ruling came down, the health minister's department turned down the third-round appeal for special orthodontic surgery for a little girl from Alberta.

At the time, Health Canada denial rates for orthodontic appeals were 80% in the first round, 99% in the second round, and a full 100% in the third round. Tell me that is not systemic denial of services to children. However, with the new government, it has gotten worse. It is now 99% denials in the first round for orthodontic surgery, 99% at the second level, and 100% at the third level. How can government members stand in the House and say they are going to support children when they are actually fighting that family in court?

In fact, the health minister decided that there was a better way to spend taxpayers' money. She spent three times the amount of money on lawyers in the justice department to fight that little girl's family than it would have cost to provide the medical care.

• (1020)

That is what systemic, racist discrimination looks like. I want to see the government stand up today and tell us that little girl in Alberta will not have to worry that her teeth are going to fall in because she is being denied service while government lawyers fight her family. This is not a question that is asking for something unfair. This is about compliance with the law.

In my final moments, I want to talk about the suicide crisis we are seeing. When the little girl from Grassy Narrows died, what we heard was that there were no mental health services. What I have seen in northern Saskatchewan and heard elsewhere is that they could not get the treatment or they were denied the treatment.

I asked an official at Health Canada if the department tracked the young people who were turned down or the delay rates. He said, “Yes, we are very concerned about mental health. Yes, to answer your question, the department does have records of people.” I asked if he would share those statistics, and he said the department would be happy to provide those statistics.

We wrote to the department and asked it to provide the statistics tracking the young people who were being denied health services and who were facing suicide. The department wrote us back, saying that Health Canada was unable to provide data on the number of requests and approval rates.

Health Canada does not track the children it rejects. What kind of system does not even bother to keep track of the children under its responsibility? That is why children are dying. That is why children are ending upon the street. That is why the government has been found guilty of racist, systemic discrimination against children.

What we are hearing now is that change is incremental, that we should not worry because it will get better over time. I am sorry, but the communities we represent should not have to crawl and fight for inches of ground when children are suffering, when children are being denied their greatest potential.

What we are asking for through the compliance orders of the Human Rights Tribunal is actually peanuts compared to what the government would be willing to spend on other things. What kind of nation thinks it can squander the hope and potential of their children? What kind of government believes it is above the law, when we are talking about racist discrimination, systemic discrimination against children?

It is a question of what kind of Canada we are going to be in 2016. Children only get one childhood. Once it is gone, it can never come back. I am urging my colleagues in the House of Commons to do the right thing. What we are asking here is not the opinion of the New Democratic Party, these are the findings of the Human Rights Tribunal that affects all of our nation. We can do better as a nation if we are willing to put the needs of the children first.

At the beginning, I spoke about the young children we have lost. I do not want to come in here to do another motion in the name of a child who was lost because of systemic laziness. I want us to be promoting the children who are going to go on and create the kind of Canada that we need.

Business of Supply

However, we need to see the government recognize that it has legal responsibilities, that it has to meet these terms that have been laid out, the full implementation of Jordan's principle. It needs to stand up in court and say that it will no longer fight families in court, that it will meet that shortfall in child welfare that has been identified this year as \$155 million, and that it will explain to the Canadian public why it did not even bother to crunch numbers in response to the Human Rights Tribunal. It just pulled a set of numbers off the shelf and handed it off, pretending it was its own. It is like stealing someone else's homework and thinking it will be patted on the back for it. It is not acceptable.

The \$71 million this year does not cut it. The amount of money the government has put aside for next year does not cut it. It does not meet the shortfalls that have been identified. This is the final element of our motion, that the government needs to come forward with the documents to prove whether it has been studying this at all or is just making up numbers out of thin air.

I have enormous respect for the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I know she wants to support the motion. I also know that the Prime Minister gets his advice from Michael Wernick. That is the man who has the Prime Minister's ear. Michael Wernick fought the legal case against Cindy Blackstock, tooth and nail, for nine years.

I want to see the government putting the interests of children first for a change, and not the interests of the finance minister or Michael Wernick. This is about the children. We need to do this.

• (1025)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for bringing forward the motion today. I think the member agrees with the government that the system needs a complete overhaul in order to bring protection for first nations children. We are very supportive of that reform and have started the cogs in the wheel moving to make that reform happen. I am little disappointed today that the motion does not speak to that reform because I thought it was something that the member opposite would want to see. I would like for him to clarify that.

I would also like to ask a question based on the number of financial dollars quoted in the motion because the tribunal ruling was very clear. It stated that it should be based on need and that need should be identified and the resources identified to meet that need. Nowhere in the tribunal ruling that I have been able to find is the amount that should be contributed. Why did the member pull this number out of thin air as opposed to honouring the recommendation that the tribunal made?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize to her if I did not write in the motion that I wanted to thank the government for all its great work. She seemed to take that as an offence off the top. Well, the Liberals have not done great work on this file. For her to say that we pulled this number out of thin air, that is not our number. It is Cindy Blackstock's number. Cindy Blackstock is more than willing to present the document, which is part of the motion. If my hon. colleague reads section (d), it asks the government to provide the documents. If the government provided the documents, then we would know on what basis it costed this out because it fought nine years against this. The government knew this was coming. It has had

two compliance orders and it is still scratching its head and saying no one knows what the numbers are.

The government presented numbers to the tribunal that had been prepared before. If Liberals believe \$71 million this year is the adequate number, that is their opinion. The Human Rights Tribunal says it is not in compliance. This is not my opinion. This is the legal decision of the tribunal. However, if Liberals present the documents to show why \$71 million in underfunding is good enough, then I am sure the tribunal would be more than happy to read that and we will support whatever the tribunal says. Right now the tribunal says the government is in non-compliance.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of working for Jean Crowder who brought in Jordan's principle in 2007. What is really helpful in today's debate is to compare what the Liberal Party members used to stand for and what their actions are now that they are in government. I want to read a quote from the member for Yukon during the debate on Jordan's principle in 2007. He said:

In conclusion, we in Parliament must unanimously support this so that first nations children have access to the same life-saving, life-enhancing and life-building programs and services as other children. Let us not ever again have a situation where a child lives his life and dies in a hospital because of bureaucratic squabbles between governments or departments.

I wanted to read that for the record and ask my friend to comment on what the Liberal Party members used to stand for and what they are doing now that they are in government.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to meet the family of Jordan River Anderson when we moved that motion. I guess I was a lot more naive back then. I thought that when Parliament passed a motion to say it was going to protect first nation children that we were all honour bound and we would do the right thing, because it would be shameful to do any less. However, here we are all these years later and we are seeing a new government, a new health minister, and she is fighting indigenous children in court when the denial rates in her department against special orthopaedic surgery is 99% and 100%.

Recently, her officials denied a little boy an audiology test. They said it was not necessary. I was stunned when I saw that because my daughter was born deaf. We were told that for every month we lose there was a chance that our daughter would never get into school. We had to move immediately.

Some bureaucrat, not a medical doctor, a bureaucrat in the health minister's office wrote that it was not necessary. This is the kind of discrimination that indigenous children face. Imagine if a child goes to a doctor and gets a prescription or an order for specialized treatment, but someone who has never seen that child, someone who knows nothing about the case, can overrule it. That is what systemic discrimination is. I thought that when we passed Jordan's principle those days would end, but they are still alive and well with the current government.

• (1030)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the very impassioned speech by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

What is interesting is that right now the government is focused on the health accord and a battle with the provinces. It is trying to tell the provinces how to deliver health care. The federal government has a responsibility for certain populations, whether veterans or aboriginal children. Therefore, I would like to ask my colleague this. Is the government doing as good a job with respect to the support that aboriginal children need on reserve compared to what someone off reserve might receive?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I work well with my hon. colleague and have enormous respect for her. What she has laid out is the fundamental issue, which is that there is a complete discrepancy between the services that children on reserve are treated to and children off reserve. That is why it is systemic racist discrimination. That is what people back home need to understand.

We saw the numerous horrific deaths of children in care in Alberta. If the family of a child who is off reserve has problems, it is a lot cheaper, more proactive, and better in the long term to give that family support in its home. That is a common practice in the provincial systems. The common practice of how it is dealt with on reserve is that the child is taken away. When a child is taken away from his or her home, the family starts to implode. Often we see children who end up on the street or being trafficked. We have to build the family. The fundamental reason it is broken is that the financing is not there to support the family on reserve so that these children can grow up and be who they should be. However, for non-native families the known solution is to support the family.

This is the discrimination we are talking about, and I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this up.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member, but we are missing out on an opportunity. I have noticed that this minister has a genuinely caring heart for first nations and indigenous people.

Let us look at the magnitude of the problem. When I served in the Manitoba legislature for over 18 years, the last issue that I raised in substance dealt with the children of our province. Over 10,000 children were in foster care. The magnitude and seriousness of the problem is incredibly difficult to gauge. What we need is genuine reform. We need to go beyond this, and that takes working with the provinces and the different stakeholders. The provincial government plays a critical role. In 1999, the child advocate said that Manitoba was in a child care crisis back then, and it has not gotten better.

Business of Supply

Would the member not agree that what we really need is a genuine reform of the system? We need the provinces at the table, Manitoba especially. Would the member not agree that it is time that the provinces and other stakeholders start putting the child first and look for reform?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for mentioning Manitoba, because last night the Manitoba legislature, including his daughter, voted to condemn his government for its refusal to comply with the Human Rights Tribunal. Therefore, we can certainly look to Manitoba, because the provinces were not brought before the Human Rights Tribunal, the federal government was. The federal government has the responsibility.

The people on the other side can laugh about this, but we are talking about a compliance order. We are talking about whether or not the government believes it is above the law. What I am hearing from the Liberals is that they will appoint someone to consult whether or not they have to abide by the law. That does not make sense to me. If they were going to consult about Site C, they could have appointed a special appointee to determine whether the government was running roughshod over treaty rights. No, they had to take immediate action.

We have a tribunal ruling and two compliance orders. That is what this is about. It is not about what the NDP thinks. It is about what the court of Canada has said.

• (1035)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here on Algonquin territory to speak to the motion by the member for Timmins—James Bay. I want to thank the hon. member for affording me the opportunity to discuss this truly important issue, to address any misunderstandings, and to update the House on the progress we are making.

As minister, I have been mandated by the Prime Minister to engage in a renewed nation-to-nation process with indigenous people to make real progress on the issues most important to indigenous people, including child welfare.

[*Translation*]

We promised to establish a new relationship with indigenous people and a new way of doing things. We intend to keep our promise.

[*English*]

Our priority as parliamentarians and as responsible Canadians must be first and foremost the health, well-being, and protection of indigenous children.

Business of Supply

All Canadians want children to have the best chance in life. First nations children, however, do not always have the same access to quality health and social services. They too often have been apprehended and placed in situations where they have suffered abuse. They have been removed from their culture and have therefore lost their personal cultural identity, which is essential for optimal health, education, and economic outcomes. This is shameful and has to change.

For years I have been outspoken on the need to reform this system. The fact that there are more children in care than at the height of the residential schools is heartbreaking.

[Translation]

The first five recommendations of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognize the need for all of us to work together to close that gap. I intend to honour that commitment and take action immediately.

[English]

The hon. member has placed his motion in the context of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision on child and family services. I want to state clearly that the government welcomed the decision of the tribunal, and we are working to implement its findings, including ending the discriminatory practices identified by the tribunal, but we were working on this regardless of what the tribunal said about the need to make the reforms.

In my view, one of the most important factors in that discrimination is the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care. These children are separated from their families, at risk of losing their culture and identity and language, and even worse, of facing abuse and violence, as was demonstrated in the member's speech. It is the current system that causes this, and we can and will do better by these children.

The tribunal has said that it believes that the federal government is "determined to reform the entire FNCFPS Program and believes it intends to do so". We are, and we will.

[Translation]

The Minister of Health and I have been working very hard every single day to ensure that first nations children have access to the health and social services they are entitled to.

[English]

Last December, at the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly, I committed to working toward an overhaul of the child welfare system on reserve. I meant what I said that day. We are committed to nothing less than a full-scale reform of child and family services on reserve and are undertaking that reform in partnership with the provinces and territories and first nations.

We are actively reaching out to partners across the country to jointly develop options for reform. This includes working in partnership with first nations organizations, leadership, communities, front-line service providers and agencies, non-governmental organizations, other federal departments, and the provinces and territories, to meaningfully reform the first nations child and family services program.

We need transformational change. The goal of the child welfare system must be to reduce the disproportionate number of children in care, full stop. The member spoke to the need for reform, but unfortunately, that is not in the motion.

As a first step, we need to end the funding discrimination endemic in the first nations child welfare system. Budget 2016 announced an investment of \$634.8 million over five years to support the immediate needs of first nations children on reserve. This included \$71 million in immediate relief investments for first nations child and family services. The immediate relief was focused on providing additional enhanced prevention services in every province and the Yukon territory.

We agree with the tribunal that future funding must not be based on an arbitrary formula or figure created behind closed doors in Ottawa. Rather, it must be based on the actual day-to-day needs of agencies. It must be based on what it will take to operationalize transformational reform and keep kids out of care and in their communities.

We also agree that Jordan's principle applies to all first nations children, and we are already applying its full meaning and scope. Children are getting their needs met.

•(1040)

[Translation]

I am proud to report that, since the changes implemented last July, nearly 900 children from every province and territory have been designated to receive services under the expanded definition of Jordan's principle. Those children would not have had access to those services in the past.

[English]

These are concrete first steps in addressing the most pressing concerns. However, it is not only about money. Building something new, something different, means that we need to talk to the people who are most involved. This new approach means moving forward in our relationships.

We want to be accountable for results: keeping more families together and reducing the number of kids in care. It is no longer satisfactory that the federal government pays the provinces and Yukon to deliver services without any say in the results.

The current system has left kids suffering and taken them from their families and communities. One need look no further than the recent report by the B.C. child advocate to see the tragic results of how this system fails kids.

Business of Supply

We heard time and time again during our consultations on the design of the national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls about the direct connection between the failure of the child welfare system and the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. It has affected both the children who were taken and the women and mothers who were left behind.

There is the story of Reina Foster, who I was lucky enough to spend the day with in early October as part of the celebration of International Day of the Girl.

Reina was put in foster care when she was just two. It was the first of six foster homes she lived in, during which she both witnessed and experienced abuse. As I said that day, Reina spoke truth to power in a very poignant way. It reaffirmed my understanding of the need to listen to people who are affected by policies like child welfare.

We have been listening to the concerns of first nations communities and organizations regarding the child welfare system. We agree that it needs a total overhaul, and we are taking action.

On September 22, I was pleased to appoint Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux as my special representative responsible for leading the engagement process on the total reform of the on-reserve first nations child and family services program. Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux is a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island first nation in Ontario and is the chair of truth and reconciliation at Lakehead University. She has spent her whole career advocating for and advancing the rights of indigenous peoples. This appointment represents a key step in our commitment to engage with all the provinces and territories and all partners for the full-scale reform of the first nations child and family services program.

This is important, as we need to transform the system with the benefit of hearing directly from youth, incorporating their lived experiences into any new approach. The voices of the children who participated in the Feathers of Hope gathering echo in my ears every day. The feather they gave me sits on my desk, reminding me of this important work on a daily basis. They told me their difficult stories of abuse, of being separated from siblings, and of being told that their culture, their beliefs, and their traditions were inferior.

We have taken a number of concrete steps. Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux has begun consultations on reform, which will run from coast to coast. This afternoon she will be meeting with all the provincial child advocates.

We are surveying all agencies to better understand their unique and individual needs and circumstances, and we are committed to identifying best practices that achieve real and culturally appropriate results for kids.

These models include things like Touchstones of Hope, championed by Cindy Blackstock, and the Maori family conferencing model, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, in Manitoba.

The federal government is also a full partner at tripartite meetings with the provinces and the Yukon, first nations, and agencies to discuss real reforms in the system.

We are funding indigenous regional organizations to hold meetings and gather strategic information that can inform the reform process. We will be meeting with child advocates and other provincial and Yukon stakeholders.

We are working to re-establish the national advisory committee to provide advice on the engagement process and the reform of this program. The committee will include representatives from the federal government, the Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, agency directors, and an elder and youth representative.

We are also planning for a national summit on indigenous child welfare in early 2017. The summit will bring together key stakeholders and hear from youth in care, service providers, child advocates, first nations community representatives, researchers, and others who will share information about wise practices in prevention and how to support children and families.

There is a federal-provincial-territorial working group, involving senior officials who work on child and family services, to share information and best practices. I will also be working with the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to launch consultations with provinces and territories and indigenous peoples on a national early learning and child care framework.

We know how important affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care is, but we also know that for indigenous children, care must be culturally appropriate in support of their language and culture.

● (1045)

[*Translation*]

I can say with conviction that our concrete measures will help put an end to these discriminatory practices.

[*English*]

We have taken real steps to, in the Gitksan phrase, upright the canoe.

We know that real reform does not happen overnight, but we must be relentlessly focused on driving this reform. We have to understand that removing first nations children from their families, from their communities, and from their language and culture creates lasting damage.

This was what was meant by the motto of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: For the child taken, for the parent left behind. That must be and will be our motto as we reform the system once and for all and put first nations kids first.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have enormous respect for my hon. colleague, and I know how much this matters to her. I want to say that I actually feel bad that her government is putting her in this position, because she knows as well as I do what the shortfalls are.

Business of Supply

We had the parliamentary secretary say that we pulled a number out of thin air and had the minister told to say that these numbers were created behind closed doors. These numbers and the shortfall were given to the government and to the tribunal eight months ago by Cindy Blackstock, and there was no argument at the tribunal about what the shortfall was. The government then offered \$71 million, and that was supposed to be a response, but it was not a response. These were numbers the government had already created in the final days of the Harper government.

I love consultation. I think consultation is important. I agree that we have to reform it, but I am staggered to hear that the solution to a compliance order by a court is that we will start another consultation process. No. The question before us today is about complying with the Human Rights Tribunal, and when the minister says that the Liberals are actually implementing Jordan's principle, that is not what the compliance orders are saying.

Will she tell us, in the case of the young girl from Sucker Creek First Nation, if the Liberals will stop that court case against her, because the tribunal is saying that they are not implementing Jordan's principle?

That is what this is about. It is about the legal obligations that have been laid out. The shortfalls and numbers have been put to the tribunal, about which the government never argued, but it is now saying they were taken out of thin air. It is about the refusal to meet Jordan's principle, because it is still fighting children in court.

We cannot have it both ways. The minister should tell us that this case will be ended today and tell us what the government's numbers are that it opposed Cindy Blackstock on.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his concern, his support, and his leadership.

It is really important that our approach is not only about the tribunal. The tribunal is important, but because the provinces and territories were not included in the tribunal, we have to go further than that. We have to do better than that. We have to include the provinces and territories and know that these reforms will take place, bottom up, but with leadership from the federal government, and we will be accountable for the result.

This is hugely important, and I think that is why the advice we had was to increase the enhanced prevention dollars in the provinces that were not getting it. British Columbia, Yukon, Ontario, and New Brunswick were not getting the enhanced prevention dollars. That is something we could put in right away and then get on with these much-needed reforms, which, as the member well knows, are implicated in the suicide tragedy across this country and in missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We have to get on with the reforms.

On Jordan's principle, since the change in the definition, we are very pleased to report that we changed that definition in July, and since that time, almost 900 kids are now able to get the supports and services that were not previously available, including Health Canada workers going out and reaching out to communities to find these kids that really should be getting better care. We know we still have more to do.

● (1050)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments about the transformation needed within the system, and I think most people in this House would agree that we need to look at significant changes.

What we are talking about right now, though, is the here and now. The minister talked about \$634 million. Most of that is back-loaded until after the next election. Does the minister believe that the funding currently provided in her budget is adequate to meet the urgent needs of children? Yes, transformation is needed, but does she believe that the government has adequately supplied the funding for today?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think the member will understand that in fixing this wrong, the tribunal asked us to provide funding based on real needs. One of the problems right now in this broken system is that a lot of the money is going to non-indigenous families to raise indigenous kids, where the children do not do well, and certainly the families on reserve do not do well, having had the child removed.

Therefore, what we are doing right now is putting in place the enhanced prevention dollars, putting that money in place in the provinces and in the territory that did not receive it. We will then ramp up the money to make sure that we are funding the real needs on the ground that will be in keeping with the reforms, which will be getting money onto reserves to help families, extended families, and communities raise those children in a culturally safe way so that they will do well.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her passion and commitment to transform a system so we can get concrete results for the aboriginal community on the issues that plague them.

For the past 10 years, the Harper government did nothing. In fact, the Conservatives were accused of not protecting the children. They were accused of systemic racial discrimination.

What are some of the challenges the minister faced when she took over a file that had not been acted on?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there has been 150 years of problems, which have been badly addressed, particularly in this file.

From residential schools to the sixties scoop, time and time again governments have thought that indigenous children would be better looked after in situations where they did not protect their culture and their language. Frankly, the previous government refused to support or fund language and culture in schools on reserve.

Secure personal cultural identity is not some little extra, but is essential to self esteem, resilience, and all of these things. We know that we must do better on language and culture.

Business of Supply

We know that we must do better in reforming this system. However, these reforms are going to have to be bottom-up reforms, with real consultation with first nations, including listening to the children. We have to listen to these children, or we are going to get it wrong.

• (1055)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the minister's comments on the Liberals inheriting a broken system, this has been broken for decades.

Her colleague said that it was the Harper government, and we all know that, but what I am trying to get my head wrapped around is that when it came time to put forward a child welfare plan, it does not seem to be based on the minister's vision of a proactive grassroots approach to helping children. Instead, the government actually presented the Harper numbers. The \$71 million in the budget this year was decided before the tribunal's ruling and before the current government came in. We're actually dealing with a road map that was created by the previous government, which is not in response to the Human Rights Tribunal.

When the minister says this is not just about the tribunal, we get it that there is a bigger issue, but what we are talking about today is compliance with the Human Rights Tribunal. That is the issue.

On Jordan's principle, I do not want to contradict the minister, but the tribunal has limited the definition of Jordan's principle to children with short-term needs, such as the badly handicapped, on reserve. There may be 900 more children getting it, but Jordan's principle in full is that all children in first nations deserve equal medical treatment, and the Liberals are not complying with that.

Will the government change the definition at the tribunal and stop these court cases against children?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure the member that long before the tribunal result came forward, we were preparing what we could do to reform the system. We knew that we had to put in the enhanced prevention dollars—the \$71 million—and that we had to reform the system.

It is really important that we get to the reforms, working with the provinces and the territories, because children are not being served by the present system and putting too much money into a failed system can actually cause really bad results.

We want to build the capacity, but on Jordan's principle itself, it is really important to remember that the definition used to be multiple handicaps for multiple service providers, but the refined definition, as of July, is that any child with a disability is entitled to the care they deserve. That is what we are doing.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock.

Today we are speaking to the NDP motion on the Human Rights Tribunal ordering an end to discrimination. The member has four components to his motion. He calls for some immediate investments and a funding plan to address some shortfalls. The motion calls for the full implementation of Jordan's principle, which as members are aware, we passed a unanimous motion in support of on December

12, 2007. The member talks about full compliance with the Human Rights Tribunal's orders and for the government to stop fighting indigenous families in court and to cover the costs of services. The final component is about the availability of pertinent documents.

I just want to give one example. It is perhaps a bit dated, but it really illustrates how unfair the system can be at times. I provided service in a small rural community. There was an on-reserve component and an off-reserve component. I can remember a young man who lived off reserve and had Duchenne muscular dystrophy. He was increasingly losing his mobility and ability to breathe. The province provided wraparound services for this young teenager, who tragically died. It provided him with support around the clock, including equipment and ventilation. He was able to stay in his home for the final months of his life with a complete set of wraparound services from the province. There was a similar young child on reserve nearby, but we did not have access to that same support and services for that child. So we had two children with horrific disabling illnesses but who truly had different levels of service. That is not okay in Canada. Clearly, that experience is a little dated, but from what we are hearing today we have not gone where we need to go with this.

I want to start with the first part of the motion calling for an infusion of dollars. It really has been portrayed as an infusion of dollars to deal with short-term emergency needs. The minister said that if they spend more money on a bad system, it is bad money. I am sorry, but if they are providing the same level of support as in the example I gave, I do not consider that to be spending bad money. Normally my party and I are reluctant to call on the government to spend additional money, because, frankly, the current government has an incredible spending problem. It has a real lack of restraint in how it is spending money, with the deficit going from \$10 billion to \$30 billion to \$35 billion. But there are times when there is an exception, and clearly in this case we are talking about the most vulnerable children in Canada and the tribunal's ruling that found systemic discrimination in welfare programs from underfunding of people on reserve compared to those off reserve.

I want to point out something else. Again, we are reluctant when we call on the government, and do not do it lightly, when we say it needs to spend more funds. But the current government, in its first 100 days of office, committed to spending \$4.3 billion outside this country. The Liberals have done nothing to deal with a crisis in Canada with our most vulnerable children. I find it very troubling. Yes, we need to do our part in the world, but we have spent \$4.3 billion outside the country compared to the much smaller amount of funding we are asking for here.

Business of Supply

The Liberals point to the \$634 million. I asked the minister a specific question about the \$634 million that they have actually committed, but what she neglected to mention is that over half the money is not going to come until after the next federal election. It is all very nice to throw out large numbers and to make it look like perhaps they are going to do something and that they are concerned, but this spending will be after 2019.

●(1100)

It is important to note that while we are calling for additional dollars, this must be accompanied by the new policies that will ensure the funds are used effectively and that there is full accountability.

Ultimately, we support the notion that there needs to be a restructuring of the service, but we also call for full transparency on what the government is doing, where it is going, and how it is going to get there. I continue to be very concerned about the government's unwillingness to have indigenous organizations be responsible and transparent to their people.

Members have heard me regularly talk about the First Nations Financial Transparency Act and how community members are desperate for the information. The same goes for child welfare services. As the system is transformed and as dollars get spent, there needs to be a mechanism so we know what is being done.

Also, the Liberals are pretty good with their words, rhetoric, and glowing terms. I look back with pride at the practical things our government accomplished. Against resistance, we had human rights applied on reserve. We passed matrimonial real property rights. We talk about the need for water, and there is a lot of recent focus on water infrastructure. In actual fact, the Conservatives provided more dollars per year over our term. The Liberals promised \$360 million and over the same time frame, the Conservatives spent \$400 million.

In spite of the talk about how the government is trying to improve things, when push comes to shove, the Conservative government spent more dollars.

We can look at mental health services. The Conservatives budgeted \$300 million in 2015-16 for mental health. The Liberals have currently budgeted \$271 million. Canadians should dive into the details, and look a little beyond some of the talk.

We know that we need to do something with the first nations education system. The Conservatives committed dollars; the Liberals committed dollars. The difference is this. Like every Canadian province and territory, there is education legislation in place to ensure that minimum standards are met for education, core curriculum, and graduation requirements. There are dollars going forward, but these dollars will not have a framework, the kind that is expected in every province and territory.

I want to talk a little about Jordan's principle, which we all have supported. First nations children should have the same rights, access to services, and opportunities as every other Canadian child. The child first policy for jurisdictional disputes involving the care of first nations is simply unacceptable.

I want to give another example. I go back a little ways in terms of my communities that were both on and off reserve. This is about a

mother with a new child. The mother had FASD. The infant was failing rapidly. As we explored, we learned the mother had no money and she did not realize that the substitution of Coffee-mate and water was not the same as formula. Again, the discrepancy of what happens on reserve and what happens off reserve with respect to identifying the mother and putting those supports in place is simply unacceptable.

Today we are talking about something that is very important. The Liberals are busy talking about working with the provinces on the new health accord that must be in place, that they have to tell the provinces how they can deliver care better. The federal government is responsible for delivering health care to aboriginals, to veterans, and to many groups. Perhaps we should be listening to the provinces on how we might do a better job in the communities and the people for whom we have a direct responsibility. Rather than directing the provinces, they could be giving us a little direction in what we are doing.

●(1105)

The NDP members have brought forward a significant motion. In general, the Conservatives would be reluctant to suggest that money is urgently needed, but in this case, the NDP has put something forward that is reasonable, appropriate, and a way to protect our responsibility in the short term, which is to protect the most vulnerable in indigenous communities, especially children.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an issue my colleague raised was financial accountability. Whenever money is designated for children, we want to ensure children get that money. This is about all of us having a moral and legal responsibility to look out for children.

The Liberals have told me that the number we brought forward was created behind closed doors, or that it was pulled out of thin air. I do not know what bureaucracy Cindy Blackstock has. These numbers were given to the tribunal over eight months ago, and the government has refused to counter with any numbers of its own. If there is to be transparency and accountability, one would think that departments as big as Indian Affairs and Health Canada, which have enormous numbers of staff, could rebut Cindy Blackstock, who has a team of three or four.

We have a set of numbers laid out with respect to the shortfall and no one from the government has countered with a credible number in the nine-month period. What it is offering us now is another series of endless consultations.

Business of Supply

What does my hon. colleague think of that? After nine years of court battles, a ruling was made by the tribunal. Surely somebody on the other side would have actually crunched the numbers to give the House a credible number of what that shortfall was.

•(1110)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point. When we asked the minister directly if she believed that this year there was enough money in the system to ensure the adequate care of vulnerable children, we did not get an answer and we were not provided a different number. I suspect the number is reasonable, which is why we have indicated they think it is a good start.

We would certainly welcome the government tabling documents or sharing with us why it believes it has perfectly and adequately funded this year. However, I also have to wonder why, after five years, the majority of the funds it had committed were backstopped. If it is needed five years from now, I cannot imagine that it is not needed today.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her rather newfound commitment on this issue. I want to ask her very specifically about the last nine years. Why did her government, which she supported, fight this process every step of the way? Why has she now come to a new conclusion?

It also gives me a chance to thank the member who moved this motion for his commitment, which has been transparent and available to us for many years.

The member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo was part of a government that fought this process. Could she explain why it fought a process that would have helped vulnerable first nations children get equitable access to everything they need?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I look at our record with pride. I talked about matrimonial real property rights being protected on reserve and applying human rights legislation on reserve. I went through a number of figures about how, in spite of very grand words by the Liberal government, we were the ones who put money into the water system, were looking forward to investing in education, and had more dollars committed to mental health. We were doing things that made a difference to vulnerable children living on reserve. I am very proud of our record.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of issue that is all too often brought back to this place. Despite many efforts over many years to make a difference, we are clearly failing indigenous children.

Cindy Blackstock is a voice of conscience. I was ashamed when we discovered that some years ago she was being harassed and tracked by our security agents. We need to thank her, we need to give her the voice she needs, and support her in this.

Would my hon. colleague not agree that it is long past time that we put the welfare of indigenous children front and centre as we work toward truth and reconciliation?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, we had a coming together in the House with respect to genocide and Yazidi women and girls as sex slaves. I think that was a very proud moment for all of us. We look forward to the government taking action.

Just two weeks we had a 10-year-old commit suicide in Saskatchewan. We have a suicide epidemic. We have a poverty epidemic. Maybe this time the House can come together as one to look at this tragedy.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion of my fellow colleague, the member for Timmins—James Bay.

I would like to commend Cindy Blackstock for her work on this issue. Her and I have had conversations over the years. We do not necessarily always agree on the method of getting to where we want to go, but I can say definitively that we both share the same ideas of where children in our Canadian society need to be. Once again, I commend her for her work on this and look forward to continuing to work with her to bring forward the change she is advocating for and doing a tremendous job on as well.

I would also like to thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for his tireless work on this issue. I sit on the northern and aboriginal affairs committee with him. The wealth of knowledge he brings to the table is incredible. His passion is unparalleled. While we do not necessarily always agree on the method of getting to the goal we both share, we do work hard together to ensure we do make progress on these issues.

The actions in his motion were brought to us by the Human Rights Tribunal. In the motion, the first thing he says is that we need to immediately start investing the \$155 million in the delivery of child welfare, as identified by Cindy Blackstock.

Interestingly, in the government's first 100 days, it committed to spending \$4.3 billion outside Canada. However, we could have taken some of that \$4.3 billion and spent it here.

As my colleague before me stated, typically, we are not in the business of saving money. The government should spend money on things. In this case, we could have moved that money away from, perhaps, vanity projects outside the country to projects inside the country, on the people for whom it could make the greatest difference.

Typically, aboriginal children who are dealing with the health care system as it is, in all its patchwork across the country, are some of the low-hanging fruit. We would get good value for our dollars spent in this area. We could make a significant change.

It is interesting to see the government spend billions of dollars outside of the country when we have significant problems at home.

Business of Supply

The government said that it was making historic investments. The term “historic investments” is somewhat a hazy term. When I hear that, I think it is making unprecedented investments or investments that are larger than ever before. However, perhaps what the Liberals meant by “historic” was that they were making investments similar to Paul Martin or Jean Chrétien. It is part of a game the government likes to play. It uses euphemisms that people think mean one thing, but then the government says that it did not mean it, that it means something else.

It did the same thing with respect to Canada Post. The government said that it had put a moratorium on community mailboxes. People took that to mean they would get their door-to-door delivery reinstated. When people asked about the door-to-door delivery coming back, the government said that it would not be coming back, that it meant that no further community mailboxes would be built.

● (1115)

That is another part of the game that is being played here. The government says it is making historic investments, and we all thought it was going to make larger investments than ever before. I will mention a specific project. The water project, for example, involved bringing potable water to all first nations homes. Our previous government had committed \$400 million for that project in our last budget. In budget 2016, the Liberals only committed \$360 million. The investments are historic in the fact that they are going backward. I am not quite sure how that makes any sense.

I would like to think that we made progress. Being the government is hard work. Everybody wants everything immediately. As my colleague said, we can be proud of our record. We did not fix the entire system, but it has been broken for 100 years, and we did make progress. Incrementally, we fixed a number of things.

My colleague who spoke before me mentioned how we brought human rights to first nations, how we brought matrimonial property rights to first nations, how we worked on the water situation, how we began the hard work of overhauling the education system on reserves, and how we worked on the issue of mental health. We made some progress on all of these issues. Yes, it did not happen as fast as we would have liked. We definitely would like to see things progress much further, so that the line between our indigenous people and the rest of Canada, if I may put it that way, would disappear, and we would all be Canadians. Our government made progress on a lot of those things.

The Liberals, on the other hand, make more promises for consultation. It is nice that they say all the right words, but I have not seen any indication that we are making any progress. In some respects we have gone backward a bit by the fact that the minister has said she is not going to enforce the accounting transparency law that we put on the books. That has its own issues, as well, in that we undermine the whole rule of law in Canada when we say we have this law on the books and are not going to enforce it. If the Liberals do not like a certain law then they should repeal it, but we undermine the law when we do that.

One thing that is important for me is education. A lot of the issues we deal with can be helped along this road of progress if we can fix the education system on reserves. One of the ideas that has been brought to my attention is to perhaps go to some sort of voucher

system, which would allow parents the choice to lead their children's education. This would take away some of the bureaucratic sluggishness that comes with the current system that we deal with, which is very much a top-down approach. Some sort of voucher system would allow parents to choose which stream of education they would like their children to go into. I was in Clyde River in Nunavut recently. There is a very nice school there that is doing amazing work, but it is having trouble getting all its students in there.

I will be supporting the motion, and I look forward to seeing what the government will do on it. All of us are seized with this issue. This is the children of our nation we are talking about and their health care. I will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay. We have our differences, but we do stand together on our goals for the outcome.

● (1120)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, rising today is difficult, having heard so many different debates in this chamber over the years and still not having the completion of the task that is necessary for social justice for so many people. The systemic discrimination that has been faced is not only historic in terms of the precedent in the making of our nation, but also it should be part of our healing process, and for that, supporting the motion is only one step. Specifically, what will the member and his party do to ensure that supporting the motion actually leads to real results?

● (1125)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, real results are what we are all about. We have always moved cautiously and perhaps too cautiously in some instances, but we state a goal of what we are trying to do and then we try something to see if we are going to get to that goal, and if it is not working we try something else. We do know what the goal is, and that is where the member for Timmins—James Bay and I agree. We agree on what the stated goal is, but we often disagree on how to get there. We do agree on the goal and we do want to see tangible results, particularly from this motion but on a wide range of other things such as education.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for endorsing the principles and the rulings that have been outlined. I would like to ask a couple of questions, because the tribunal was very clear that the child welfare system and the investment in child welfare in first nations should be based on the need of the child. Does the member agree with that ruling, or does he feel, as do the New Democrats, that we should assign an arbitrary number, a dollar amount, for funding investment into the child welfare system, or should government be basing this on what the need is for children in first nations?

Business of Supply

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, it does not matter what kind of a number we are trying to come up with; at some point it is arbitrary. Based on the need; that is a fairly fuzzy definition. Based on the need means a limitless amount, I suppose, so at some point we do have to take all the available knowledge into consideration and come up with a number. What that number is; that is probably where we would get, with this House, several different numbers depending on the weighting of the different areas of information we get.

Cindy Blackstock has been seized with this issue for a great part of her life. Long before I came to this place, I used to hear her on the radio. Several times I followed her on the Internet as well, and she always seemed to have a good handle on what the issues were. Sometimes I disagreed with her on the method of getting to the stated goal, but as I said before, we typically have the same goal in mind. I would respond by saying give us the arguments why it is not a good number.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I notice my colleague started his speech with the same reservations that I had: yes, sometimes we have to call for government to spend money on critical and urgent matters, especially Canada's most vulnerable children. If he could give a broader statement in terms of the spending in general that we are more concerned about, I think it would help frame what the conversation is today.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, \$155 million is what Cindy Blackstock has outlined to fill the gap. The government is spending \$30 billion as a deficit, past what is needed for a balanced budget; so \$155 million in the sea of \$30 billion is a drop in the bucket, to put that in perspective. I wish I had some more tangible numbers. I typically like to outline things in numbers of cars or something like that. I do not have numbers right now on how many cars that would be, but the numbers are in place. There are three zeros dropped off to get from billion to million, so it is a significant amount of money the Liberals are overspending. To say this is an arbitrary number is something.

• (1130)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise to speak to this motion. I will be sharing my time with the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

We are here today debating a very important motion, a motion that relates to the right of all Canadian children to have a childhood. Specifically what we are calling for is, first, the immediate investment of an additional \$155 million in new funding for the delivery of child welfare as identified in the shortfall this year; second, establishing a funding plan for future years that would end the systemic shortfalls in child welfare, as ruled by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal; third, implementing the full definition of Jordan's principle; fourth, fully complying with all orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal; fifth, committing to stop fighting indigenous families in court, and instead spend those dollars on their medical and social services; and finally, making public all pertinent documents related to the overhaul of the child welfare system and the implementation of Jordan's principle.

Why is this action necessary?

We had, in January of this year, the historic ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. That tribunal ruled that the Canadian government had racially discriminated against 163,000 first nations children in systematically underfunding services to them, therefore putting those children at risk far and above other Canadian children. The tribunal ruled clearly that the underfunding amounted to systemic racism.

The executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, Cindy Blackstock, of whom many in this place have spoken glowingly—and she certainly is a hero for Canadian children—has said there is something seriously wrong that she would have to pursue this critical right over an entire decade in the courts, simply for the rights of first nations children to have the same rights as other Canadian children. I think that certainly everybody in this place would agree with that. She continues by saying that they are speaking of first nations children among Canadian children who are left to believe in truth that they are less worthy than others in this country. If there is anything that can pull at our heartstrings, it is when Cindy shares that indigenous children have said to her that they feel they are worth less because they are receiving fewer services.

As others have said, the federal government is spending millions of dollars in opposing the delivery of rights to indigenous Canadians and against delivering on Jordan's principle instead of actually delivering those services. We firmly believe, and I am sure all Canadians believe, that it makes far more sense in wise spending of taxpayer dollars to spend them on delivering the very services that families need instead of on taking the families to court.

Finally, the most important thing is that it is time for the current government to set an example for everybody else in this country and actually comply with the rulings ordered against it. Reprehensibly, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has had to twice issue directives to the government to comply with its order.

Here we are today with a new Liberal government that promised immediate action. It was a number-one priority, nation to nation, that it would deliver on the needs and the rights of first nations children and their families. Yet we have that very government failing to even comply with the directives of the tribunal to deliver this mere \$153 million.

Business of Supply

We have a situation of the tribunal having twice over issued the compliance orders to the government merely to comply with the law, an order to the federal government to ensure comparable services to indigenous children. What is important to point out is that, not only did the government fight the right of first nations children to have comparable services, but it fought the right and power of the tribunal itself to even consider the case; and then fought Cindy Blackstock, who brought that case, against her access to documents. In all three cases, she won against the Government of Canada. Millions upon millions of dollars were wasted fighting this case over a decade, when the government simply could have delivered the dollars to Canadian children.

What is Jordan's principle? We have spoken a lot about that in here. That arose because of a New Democratic Party motion in 2007, unanimously supported by the House of Commons.

• (1135)

Essentially it is quite simple. Everybody in this place in 2007 committed that all medical services would be delivered to aboriginal children and that they would not be left in the quandary where a young aboriginal child, Jordan, died while the federal and provincial governments argued over who was responsible for paying for his services. The decision was, whoever has the first contact with the child, delivers the service and they worry later about who pays. That decision by the House is consistent with Canadian children's human rights, their constitutional rights, and their treaty rights.

The tribunal held that the government has since that date systematically limited that duty in responding to medical needs. As we heard my colleague from Timmins—James Bay say earlier on, we now have a case where indigenous children are seeking medical assistance, dental assistance, and we are at the state where there is almost 100% denial every time they come forward with these special medical needs.

The government has been systematically clawing back Jordan's principle. The tribunal ruled that is not appropriate, that “comparable services” means “comparable services”, and that first nations children living on reserve have the right to comparable access to medical services.

A heartbreaking statistic on failed child welfare comes from my own province. An Alberta study reported that between 1999 and 2013, 145 children in foster care died, and 75% of those children were indigenous. The government later revealed that it was actually 741 deaths, including 24 infants. That surely will spur us to come forward and support the motion. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

Mr. Justice Rosborough, an Alberta judge, found in an inquest into the death of a baby in the Samson Cree First Nation:

It would appear that there is a significant disparity in the level of funding provided for children “off reserve” as opposed to those “on reserve”.... An archaic funding arrangement with the latter results in considerably fewer resources made available to them.

Raven Sinclair, who is a professor of social services in Saskatchewan, stated that:

There are an incredible number of kids dying in care each year.... This isn't just an accident. It is not a fluke of statistics. It is happening year after year.

As many in this place have said, this is not simply a request coming from New Democratic members. That is not what we brought forward in the motion. It is endorsed by credible organizations across this country. The Canadian Paediatric Society has called for immediate action on the Jordan's principle and immediate action on the ruling by the tribunal. It references also the government's commitment to deliver on every recommendation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

What was the commission's number one priority recommendation? It was on the legacy of failure on child welfare. It calls on the federal, provincial, territorial, and aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of aboriginal children in care by providing adequate resources to enable aboriginal communities and child welfare organizations to keep aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so and to keep the children in culturally appropriate environments. Second, it calls on the federal government to prepare and publish reports on the number of aboriginal children in care. As has been mentioned earlier, we do not have those statistics. Third, it calls upon all levels of government to deliver fully on Jordan's principle.

As has been mentioned in this place, the Manitoba legislature last evening unanimously called on the federal government to act and deliver the necessary dollars ordered by the tribunal. The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, under the direction of Cindy Blackstock, has said and reminded us that children only get one childhood and it is our obligation to make sure they equally get that opportunity. The national chief of the Assembly of First Nations has called on this government to deliver fully and comply with the tribunal direction.

As has been mentioned earlier, within the government's budget deficit of over \$30 billion, surely it can find a pitiful \$100 million for first nations children.

I ask every member in this place to support the motion and make this the Parliament that finally ended 150 years of discrimination against indigenous children.

• (1140)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member stated when she was speaking that the government had been withholding documents. I just wanted to make the member aware, first of all, that all of our submissions to the tribunal are available to the public. I think the process is to contact the tribunal and it can make available all of the documents the government submitted at that time.

My question is around the implementation of the tribunal's ruling around reforming the child welfare system. I would like to ask the member what her thoughts are about reforming the entire child welfare system as it pertains to first nations children in Canada.

Business of Supply

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question and her dedication to these issues, and certainly to first nation children in Labrador.

What I have called for is simply what the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations has called for. He has called for the release right away of the calculation that the government has made and how it determined it would give out a measly \$75 million. That is not something that simply I and my party are calling for. It is what everyone is calling for.

What I spoke about was the previous government's continuously going to court and refusing to provide documents. Those documents were finally provided and assisted the tribunal in reaching its ruling.

Yes, we need to reform the system, but as everyone, including the TRC and the Canadian Paediatric Society has said, we need to immediately provide these dollars.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given the fact that through our history we have destroyed the basic family unit within our indigenous cultures, does she see that as being detrimental to the underlying health issues that seem to exist in disproportionate numbers in our indigenous communities?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question because I wanted to share some information that I did not get an opportunity to before.

It has been pointed out in a number of places that the underlying reason why indigenous children are suffering from these health problems, sent into foster care, and so forth is that this is the legacy of residential schools.

Yes, we need to immediately provide the dollars necessary to provide the basic services for comparable access to education, social services, and health care. We also need expedited action to address poverty, lack of food, unsafe housing, care and addictions, and care for those suffering from fetal alcohol disorders.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to point my colleague to part (b) of our motion, where we ask the government to implement the full definition of Jordan's principle, as outlined by the House of Commons. I mention that because I was absolutely shocked that the Minister of Indigenous Affairs today came up with her own definition of Jordan's principle.

She said that it used to be “multiple handicaps for multiple service providers”, but as of July, children with disabilities will get care. In fact, what it means at the tribunal is that children with critical short-term illnesses or severe disabilities, if they are on reserve, will get care.

That is not what Jordan's principle says. Maybe the minister is making things up now with Indigenous Affairs, so that they can rewrite a motion in the House of Commons.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague this question. Jordan's principle was that any first nation child needing care will get care. It did not define what kind of care or who is eligible. I want to ask her why there is this disconnect, with the government pretending that Jordan's principle that was passed is somehow different and so much more restrictive.

● (1145)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would actually like to expand beyond that. Far from going in the direction of reducing and circumscribing what we agreed to in this place, that every first nation child should have comparable access to social services, education, and medical services, frankly, constitutionally it is clear. The federal government has an obligation to all first nation children, all Inuit children, and all Métis children.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion moved by my NDP colleague, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, whose riding is next to Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Our ridings share a border, but that border is meaningless to the indigenous communities, in the sense that it was imposed on them and that their ancestral lands lie on both sides of the border. For example, the Timiskaming First Nation ancestral territory is in my riding, but it spills into my colleague's riding of Timmins—James Bay because these borders were established long after these territories were.

This motion calls on the government to comply with the historic ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordering the end of discrimination against indigenous children. We are calling on the government to immediately reinvest an additional \$155 million for the delivery of child welfare that has been identified as the shortfall this year alone. We are also calling on the government to establish a funding plan for future years that will end the systemic shortfalls in first nations child welfare.

Furthermore, we want the government to implement the full definition of Jordan's principle as outlined in a resolution passed by the House on December 12, 2007. The government must fully comply with all orders made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and commit to stop fighting indigenous families in court who are seeking access to services covered by the federal government. Paragraph (d) of the motion calls on the government to make public all pertinent documents related to the overhaul of child welfare and the implementation of Jordan's principle.

Business of Supply

Jordan's principle gives priority to the child's interests and is named after Jordan River Anderson, a Cree child from Norway House, in Manitoba. He was born with complex medical needs and unnecessarily spent more than two years in hospital because the Province of Manitoba and the federal government could not agree on who should pay for his home care. Jordan passed away in hospital when he was five and was never able to spend a single day at home, even though that would have been possible with appropriate home care.

Unfortunately, payment disputes between federal and provincial governments over services to first nations children are all too common. First nations children are often kept waiting for services they desperately need or denied services available to other children in the areas of education, health, day care, recreation, culture, and language.

Anyone who tries to understand the federal government's logic is in for a surprise. The list of prescription drugs and treatments eligible for reimbursement is not the same for all groups of people under federal responsibility. The government does not reimburse veterans, serving military personnel, and members of first nations for the same drug list.

It is the same government in all cases, and Health Canada is in charge of approving all prescription drugs available for sale in Canada, but the list of drugs eligible for reimbursement depends on a person's status.

I have had several conversations with the doctor in Malartic who is in charge of public health. He told me how confusing prescribing drugs to aboriginal people can be because they are covered for fewer drugs than whites. It is a discriminatory administrative nightmare that causes doctors a lot of problems.

In many cases they prescribe treatments that might work, but that are not ideal in a given situation. Patients do not get the best possible treatment, and people have to deal with red tape.

According to Jordan's principle, the government that has first contact pays for the services and seeks reimbursement later so that children are not trapped in a bureaucratic quagmire involving different levels of government. That makes sense.

● (1150)

Patients should not have to fight these battles back and forth, especially when we are talking about patients who are pre-school aged children. These battles often go on and on between the various governmental jurisdictions.

It just makes sense to ask that medical services be paid, to ensure that patients receive care as quickly as possible when they need it. The fight to determine who ultimately pays for it, and who reimburses whom, can happen after the fact. It makes no sense to force patients to wait, least of all indigenous children, to determine who is going to pay the bill and whether the cost of treatment will be reimbursed or not, especially when it would be reimbursed in all other cases. It makes no sense.

We are also talking about children who are often critically ill. If treatment is delayed because of red tape, the patient's condition could deteriorate and treatment could wind up being a lot more expensive

later, because care could unfortunately become more complicated as time goes on. We could mention antibiotic resistance, for example. Treatment must not be delayed, because the patient's condition could become more complicated, especially if the patient, in this case a child, gets a nosocomial or hospital-acquired infection, because he or she had to wait too long for treatment.

This red tape war against children and parents has to stop. We cannot keep taking people to court for treatments that often cost less than the lawyers' fees. This happens all the time.

People fight tooth and nail in court to get out of paying for treatment only to end up losing because the ruling simply makes no sense, especially when we consider that non-indigenous children are reimbursed for the same treatments by their province and the lawyer fees cost more than the treatment. It makes no sense. It is wasting a dollar to save a quarter.

Nobody is saving money. Most of the time, people's cases are found to be without merit, because these treatments are not experimental. This is pediatric care offered to non-aboriginal children in most hospitals. When it comes to care provided to children, one must be consistent and ensure that aboriginal children receive the same care as non-aboriginal children.

There are five Algonquin communities in my riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue, which is on Anishnabe land. Some are having a really tough time. In Pikogan, the Abitibiwinnik live near a major centre and have access to services in the town of Amos.

However, some communities in Témiscamingue are very remote. For example, Winneway, which is home to the Long Point First Nation, is about a one-hour drive from hospital if the road conditions are good. If a child from this community needed an ambulance, they could wait a long time and it would be difficult to receive care.

This community is so remote that it does not even have a school. Plans are in the works. Children are currently driven to another village to a school that had been closed. There were some cases of teenagers who were cutting themselves because they were in a school without windows. The quality of food is not always the best because there are no grocery stores in the village. There is only one small corner store that mainly sells frozen foods to be baked because these foods keep longer and do not spoil before they are purchased.

These people face serious challenges with respect to health, and I believe that it is unfair for these children to be penalized because of the federal government's approach, which unfortunately has become a bad practice.

● (1155)

I am out of time and look forward to my colleagues' questions.

[English]

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her impassioned speech and advocacy in this area.

Business of Supply

I am on the indigenous committee. We are doing a study right now on suicide within indigenous communities and have heard first-hand about a lot of the issues and concerns, as well as the terrible stories, that exist in our indigenous communities.

If there is one thing I have learned, it is that we need to empower indigenous peoples to set the priorities that will benefit their communities. Our government has shown tremendous support for the empowerment of our indigenous communities to establish that nation-to-nation relationship, and to provide a level of funding that will help to address some of the issues.

We need to be able to give our indigenous communities the ability to self-determine where those funds should go and where the priorities should be. That is only going to occur through this nation-to-nation relationship. It does not happen overnight. It has taken us a couple of centuries to get to where we are today with this abysmal situation. We need time to develop the types of programs that will benefit indigenous communities.

Would the member opposite not agree with that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, we need to establish a nation-to-nation relationship, but in order to do so, the government needs to have the courage to go into these communities and talk to people.

I visited the Winneway community during my election campaigns and I went back in between those campaigns. An unbelievable number of people told me that they had not seen a federal government representative in at least 15 years. No one has ever bothered to travel that far. If the government does not even take the time to talk to these people and see what their lives are actually like, of course it is not going to get very good results.

Obviously, the first nations must be allowed to set their own priorities. However, I can assure my colleagues that it is the priority of every member of our first nations communities to see their children and the children in their community grow up healthy. Everyone in indigenous communities is concerned about mental health. Everyone is affected by the suicides and the teenage drug use. Everyone would like first nations youth to grow up healthy.

I do not think there is any need to worry. The government can invest the \$155 million, which is the shortfall for this year alone, without worrying about people getting upset about it.

[*English*]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her contribution to the debate and her concern for first nations children across the country.

Does the member agree with the tribunal's ruling that funding for children and family services on reserve must be based on need? Does she support that ruling by the tribunal, or does she feel that it is necessary to attach arbitrary numbers to that ruling at this stage?

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, there is a \$155-million shortfall. Of course, that money needs to be distributed based on need. However, I can assure the House that there is a need. If

members would go and visit these communities, they would see that the need is there.

I do not understand what my colleague is getting at. The need is there and we need to fill it.

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

The Government of Canada is committed to a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples to make progress on issues that are most important to them, including first nations child health. One of the most glaring examples of inequity in Canada is that between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians. In this regard, our government recognizes that we need to prioritize the social determinants of health in order to resolve complex health and social issues.

We have started to do this by making historic investments in budget 2016. There is \$8.4 billion to improve the socio-economic conditions of indigenous people and their communities. We are also working collaboratively with first nations partners, provinces and territories, and other key stakeholders to ensure access to quality health programs for infants, children, youth, and families in first nations communities.

As we know, indigenous people continue to have significantly poorer health outcomes than other Canadians. For example, the life expectancy gap between first nations and the general Canadian population is 6.7 years. Indigenous heart disease and diabetes rates are considerably higher than those of the non-indigenous population, but the most heartbreaking statistics are indigenous suicide rates, which are among the highest in the world and four times the national average. This situation demands action, and our government is committed to supporting first nations and Inuit children, families, and communities.

We recognize that strategic investments in a child's early years lead to greatly improved long-term outcomes. In 2016-17, Health Canada is investing over \$100 million in programs and services that support healthy pregnancies, births, and child development for pregnant first nation and Inuit women, and the families of infants and young children.

The aboriginal head start on reserve program serves over 11,300 children in over 350 first nations communities across Canada. We recognize that through programs such as aboriginal head start, opportunities for indigenous children to learn about their language and culture are important in supporting their knowledge and connectedness to their communities. That can build resiliency and promote better health.

Business of Supply

The long-term goal of the maternal child health program on reserve is to support pregnant first nations women and families with infants and young children to reach their fullest developmental and lifetime potential. Similarly, Health Canada is investing funds to prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorder births and to improve outcomes for those affected by this disorder. These investments support first nations and Inuit communities to develop culturally appropriate and evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs, raise awareness, and educate front-line workers and families.

Our government is also supporting work to address the challenge of childhood obesity. This issue is of particular concern for indigenous children and youth, as rates of obesity are significantly higher among this group than the general Canadian population. Indigenous children are becoming obese at a very young age.

Collective efforts to improve access to and the availability of nutritious foods and to create supportive environments that can help improve health outcomes will contribute to addressing the challenges faced by some indigenous populations. This also includes Health Canada's programming, such as the aboriginal diabetes initiative and the nutrition north Canada program. Health Canada is investing \$45.8 million in 2016-17 to reduce type 2 diabetes by supporting health promotion and disease prevention activities and services in more than 400 first nations and Inuit communities. This initiative provides access to diabetes prevention, screening, and management services.

Earlier this year, we increased investments in the nutrition north Canada program by an additional \$64.5 million over five years, and a further \$13.8 million a year in ongoing funding starting in 2021-22, to expand the program so it can support an additional 37 isolated northern communities. Nutrition north Canada provides a retail subsidy to help northerners living in isolated communities get access to perishable, healthy food at lower cost. It also funds community-based nutrition education initiatives.

•(1205)

On May 30, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and the Minister of Health announced that the government would hold engagement sessions with at least 20 communities across the north to listen and learn about how to improve the nutrition north Canada program. Engagement sessions were held between May and June of this year. Other sessions are continuing to take place until November.

Our government recognizes that physical health is only half the battle. This is why we also provide a range of supports to improve mental wellness among first nation children. The brighter futures and building healthy communities programs provide funds to all communities for activities that support improved mental health, child development, parenting skills, and healthy babies. Funding currently supports mental health and well-being programming services in over 400 first nations and Inuit communities.

Unlike the suicide rates of non-aboriginal people, the rates of aboriginal suicide are highest among youth. The well-being of this demographic group is particularly pressing, considering that aboriginal youth under 20 years of age account for over 40% of the aboriginal population, and this figure is rising. The health of

these youth literally represent the future health of aboriginal communities.

Our government is also taking action on aboriginal youth suicide. The national aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy exists to ensure that indigenous families and communities have access to critical support to prevent and respond to this most tragic of problems. The national aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy supports approximately 138 community-based suicide prevention projects across Canada. The projects are diverse and focus on increasing protective factors, such as resilience, and reducing risk factors through prevention, outreach, education, and crisis response. Indigenous youth suicide is a complex issue with links to individual, family, and community mental wellness; the legacy of residential schools; a lack of access to services; and social determinants of health, such as high unemployment and low income. The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have reconfirmed the intergenerational impacts of Indian residential schools and colonization on mental health, including suicidal behaviour.

In May of this year, in response to the growing urgency of youth suicide, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs adopted a motion to undertake a study on suicide among indigenous peoples and communities. The study is ongoing and will be informed by community visits, youth round tables, and public hearings in several communities across Canada.

In June 2016, the government committed \$69 million over three years for enhanced mental wellness as an interim measure to support northern communities. Our government is fully committed to implementing Jordan's principle and is taking action to ensure that first nations children with unmet health and social needs receive the services they need and have access to services that are publicly funded, similar to all the other children in this country. In keeping with Jordan's principle, we are committed to ensuring that the care of a first nations child with health and social needs will continue, even if there is a dispute between governments regarding jurisdictional responsibility.

In closing, I hope I have helped to inform this important discussion today by outlining some of the efforts and partnerships that our government is undertaking to build healthier first nations communities and to contribute to the health and well-being of first nations children in this country. Our government remains committed to working across all sectors of society, including the health sector, to support first nations children having the best possible start in life towards a better future.

Business of Supply

•(1210)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the Minister of Health did not deliver a speech on something of this importance. That is not to denigrate my colleague, but what we are talking about here is compliance with the law and whether or not the government believes it is obliged to respect a tribunal ruling of systemic discrimination and two compliance orders. Issues of childhood obesity and diabetes I am sure are interesting on other days, but they are really irrelevant to this discussion on Jordan's principle, which the House calls on the government to respect in full, in line with its motion on Jordan's principle.

The Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs has told us that the government does not accept that full motion, that it will be limited to children with disabilities. In fact, in the tribunal hearings we have seen the government limiting its denials to children on reserve with short-term critical illnesses or disability.

Therefore, I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. The denial rates for children needing orthopaedic surgery are 99% in first round appeals, 99% in second round appeals, and 100% in third round appeals. Her minister is spending more money fighting a young child in court to deny special orthopaedic surgery than it would have cost to provide that treatment in the first place. Can the hon. member explain to anyone out there watching how her government would rather spend money on lawyers than on children with special needs requiring orthopaedic surgery?

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, I respect my hon. colleague's comments.

Our government is truly committed to putting the needs of first nations children first. We are committed to a complete overhaul of child and family services on reserve, developed with and for first nations people.

We welcomed, accepted, and are complying with the tribunal's ruling. We also acknowledge that the system, as it stands, discriminates against children. We are committed to reforming it, but achieving transformational reform requires partnership with first nations, child welfare agencies, as well as provinces and territories. Since the decision, Canada has taken real and meaningful steps to implement the tribunal's findings.

Today we announced the appointment of Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux as the minister's special representative responsible for leading a national engagement process and providing advice on the reform of the on-reserve first nations child and family services program.

This is a concrete step in our commitment to engage with partners to develop options for full-scale reform. We are determined to work with the tribunal and partners to fix the system and to do the right thing for our first nation children.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are pretty good with some big words, but I want to get very specific.

I think Jordan's principle is very specific, and I believe my colleague is a former nurse. It says that governments should pay first

and then worry about jurisdiction later, and that a first nation child on or off reserve deserves the same care and treatment.

The principle is fairly clear. However, the Liberals have made a lot of modifications to the definition. Does the member believe in Jordan's principle or believe there should be limits around what it does?

To be quite frank, if someone deserves the care that might be necessary, why would she differentiate between what is available on or off reserve, regardless of what the medical condition is?

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's comments, as I know she is a former nurse.

Our government is fully committed to implementing Jordan's principle. We are taking action to ensure that first nation children with unmet health and social needs receive the services they need and have access to services that are publicly funded, similar to all children in this country, as I stated in my speech.

In keeping with Jordan's principle, we are also committed to ensuring that the care of first nations children with health and social needs will continue, even if there is a dispute between governments regarding jurisdictional responsibility.

As my colleague must be aware, as of October 4, nearly 900 children have received services and support under the government's child-first approach to Jordan's principle, such as specialized medical equipment and supplies, medical transportation, specialized day programs for children with disabilities, addiction treatments, and respite services at a cost of approximately \$10 million.

•(1215)

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to respond to the motion by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, here on the traditional Algonquin territory.

Our priority, first and foremost, is the health and well-being of first nation children. Canada is committed to a full-scale reform of first nations child and family services with all of our first nation partners, including first nation children and youth.

We are engaging with the provinces and territories, and with first nation organizations, leadership, communities, and agencies. We will also be working with front-line service providers and other federal departments to develop a long-term strategy to address first nations child and family services, one that is transformative, sustainable, and responsive.

As a first step, the Government of Canada has provided \$71 million in immediate relief investments in 2016-17, focused on providing additional prevention services in each province and Yukon Territory.

Business of Supply

We also need to look at the full picture for improving social outcomes for first nation children. In addition to the important work we are undertaking to overhaul child welfare on reserve, we are continuing our effort in many other areas, including improving education services, infrastructure on reserve, and housing. All of these efforts work together toward building healthy lifestyles and safe environments for children, families, and communities.

We have promised indigenous people in Canada real results and real change, both in what we do and how we do it.

Over the past year, we have brought a new approach to our relationship with first nation people on the path toward reconciliation. We are upholding our promises, in the spirit of recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

I appreciate the opportunity to explain what has been accomplished and where we are going.

Together with all of our partners, we are making progress on implementing the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We have officially launched a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We have developed a new approach to Jordan's principle, responding to the needs of first nation children, whereby we are in the process of providing funds for services to close to 900 first nation children.

The Government of Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with the Assembly of First Nations in June to collaborate on developing a new fiscal relationship that provides sufficient, predictable, and sustainable funding for first nations. Making real change requires a new fiscal relationship with first nations, one that provides sufficient, predictable, and sustained funding for the communities.

Budget 2016 lifted the 2% funding cap on first nation programs. We are delivering historic investments to improve the social-economic conditions of indigenous people and their communities. Through budget 2016, we are investing \$8.4 billion over five years in support of indigenous people across the country, including in first nation education and infrastructure.

Thanks to these investments, housing units will be constructed, serviced, or renovated; new cultural and recreational projects are under way; investments are being made in projects that focus on essential physical infrastructure, like roads, bridges, energy systems, and connectivity; first nation water and wastewater projects are being supported across the country; and education infrastructure projects will help construct, renovate, or maintain schools in first nation communities.

Through funding commitments to improve child and family services, education outcomes in schools, and community infrastructure, we are committing to closing the gap in the quality of life between indigenous people and other Canadians. We are investing in education, literacy, numeracy, skills development, language, and culture.

Budget 2016 provides \$2.6 billion over five years for kindergarten to grade 12. That includes \$824.1 million to implement first nation-led transformational education.

● (1220)

We are committed to a respectful process of consultation in partnership with our first nations to ensure we get this right, together. To this end, we are working closely with first nations to better understand their long-term funding needs.

The Government of Canada is also increasing the safety and security of women and children through the construction and operation of new shelters serving residents on reserve.

Also, looking to the long term, we know that having a safe environment is key to the well-being of first nations children and families. The family violence prevention program supports the day-to-day operations of 41 shelters, as well as funding for community-driven proposals for family violence prevention projects on and off reserve.

Budget 2016 included \$33.6 million over five years and \$8.3 million ongoing to better support shelter services to serve victims of family violence in first nations communities. We also announced \$10.4 million over three years to support the renovation and construction of new shelters for victims of family violence in first nations communities. This funding will help to enhance the safety and security of women, children, and families on reserve by providing a refuge for victims of violence, providing more awareness of the issue of family violence, and providing families and communities with the tools they need to help them deal with the issue of violence.

The Government of Canada looks forward to continue working in partnership with indigenous groups, provincial governments, and territories as we all have a role to play in preventing and ending violence against indigenous women and children.

All told, these investments for social programs and infrastructure will close the gap in the social, economic, and health outcomes experienced in too many indigenous communities. We still have a long way forward and it is a path that we as Canadians all need to take together. I am confident we are heading in the right direction.

Meegwetch

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the member opposite talk about budget 2016. When we look at the specifics for the money that was allocated for child welfare, we see that it is \$684 million over five years, but over half of that will not come into play until 2019 or the year after the next federal election. It is important to remember that fact.

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Furthermore, it should be noted that Liberal MPs voted to give themselves a tax credit of \$670 when they lowered the tax rate for those making between \$89,000 and \$200,000 a year.

The question here is all about priorities. Governing is about that. It is about establishing priorities and making choices.

In light of the tax cut that was given to some of the wealthiest Canadians and the funding shortfall that exists, does the member think his government has identified the correct priorities existing in the shortfall for first nations children?

Mr. Don Rusnak: Mr. Speaker, by investing in first nations communities, this government is taking an all-of-government approach. Some of the systems in first nations communities are broken and they need to be fixed. However, throwing money at the problem is not going to solve it. We need to work with our partners and first nations communities in the provinces to ensure we get it right. Throwing money at a bad system is not going to solve the problem. We are working with our partners in first nations communities, and the provinces and territories to get it right.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I work on the indigenous affairs committee together. Right now we are in the middle of a study on suicide. We have seen and heard first hand the crisis that exists in many of our indigenous communities.

Our government is making a record \$8.4 billion investment in indigenous communities. As my other colleague has said, \$684 of that is going to go to children and family services on reserves. This is a significant investment in the future of our indigenous children.

More important, and as we have heard so many times, it is the long-term sustainable funding, self-determination, and self-governance that really is going to get at the crux of the crisis that exists in first nations communities.

Would my colleague agree that engagement in the nation-to-nation process will help to get us to that position of self-determination and that is really going to provide the solutions necessary for first nations communities in the long term?

• (1225)

Mr. Don Rusnak: Mr. Speaker, we both sit on the indigenous affairs committee and we have heard over and over again that many first nation communities do not have stable funding to offer the programs they need to ensure some of these problems are solved.

We just had the opportunity to meet with the B.C. Treaty Commission. It outlined some of the agreements that certain B.C. first nations had inked with both the province and federal governments there. Most of the first nations there are doing extremely well. They have their own source revenue. They are deciding on their education programs, not being told how they have to deliver programs. That is the key to ending the dependency created by the Indian Act, ensuring first nations have control over their own destiny and not being told what to do.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

The motion put forward by my colleague from Timmins—James Bay is very important to achieving true reconciliation with our country's first nations. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal issued a final ruling in January 2016. The Canadian government was found guilty of racial discrimination against 163,000 first nations children and their families for providing insufficient and inadequate child protection services. This is about 163,000 children. The scope is unprecedented.

Although the Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Youth, inherited this issue, the fact remains that his government is not living up to its legal and moral obligation to put an end to the systematic discrimination that indigenous children face.

This whole affair began in 2007 when the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, led by Cindy Blackstock, and the Assembly of First Nations filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission against the Canadian government, which was led by the Conservatives at the time.

One year later, in 2008, the government publicly apologized for the forced assimilation of indigenous youth in residential schools. That same year, it refused to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It took one step forward and two steps back. Unfortunately, the current Liberal government is no different.

While the Liberal government was called upon to take action in January 2016, and it fully accepted the tribunal's ruling, it continues to slow down the process. The tribunal has already issued two orders because the Liberals refuse to comply with the ruling.

The Liberal government did not appeal the ruling and must therefore take immediate action. The government must act, not in a year from now, not two weeks from now, but right now. Nor should it wait until its next term. The government is doing nothing but draw out the debate.

That is why the House must remind the government to respect the basic principle of the rule of law and meet its legal and moral obligation to correct past mistakes, end discrimination against first nations children, and immediately invest \$155 million to make up this year's shortfall for delivering services to children.

Speaking of inadequate funding and discrimination, I would like to talk about the Mohawk nation at Akwesasne, which is in my riding. Part of the nation is in my riding in southwestern Quebec, and part of it is in Ontario, but the largest part is in the United States.

The Akwesasne Mohawk people have been fighting for close to 15 years to get official recognition for their child and family services. They got it from the Ontario provincial government in 2012. That recognition enables them to take care of local issues on their own without outside agency intervention. Should getting recognition really take 15 years? I do not think so.

Business of Supply

How many children in Akwesasne have suffered while governments dragged their heels? I do not know. However, if even a single child ends up not getting services, that is one child too many. Families and children have suffered while governments argued over who is responsible for providing services. It is unacceptable for the Akwesasne community to have waited so long to get services.

That is why we need Jordan's principle, which states that first nations children should have access to the same government services as non-indigenous children and that jurisdictional disputes should not hinder the delivery of services to children.

This is not the first time we have asked the government to apply Jordan's principle. In 2007, my former colleague, Jean Crowder, moved a motion about that in the House, and it passed. Now, nine years later in 2016, it is a little frustrating to be having the same conversation all over again even though the principle was passed.

As my party's youth critic, I was unpleasantly surprised at the magnitude of mental health problems, particularly among indigenous youth.

• (1230)

Half of on-reserve first nations people say that they experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress. Half of young Inuit deaths are caused by suicide, while the suicide rate is 10% among the rest of young Canadians. The situation will not improve without long-term investment in the health of young indigenous people.

According to Health Canada, mental health is determined by complex interactions between social and economic factors, the physical environment, and individual behaviour. Indigenous communities have it harder than others in every respect.

Norah Kielland and Tonina Simeone associated the prevalence of mental health problems in indigenous communities with the oppression and marginalization that these communities have known throughout their history. The residential school system has had a multi-generational impact on the population. The most recent studies on indigenous peoples have brought some new information to the fore, and the federal government has agreed to implement their 94 recommendations.

To this day, the 150,000 children forced into residential schools still feel the lingering effects of the trauma they suffered. Lost between two cultures and scarred for life by abuse, some victims carried the brutality they suffered with them to their communities and started abusing illicit substances. The impacts of residential schools can still be seen today. First nations children are 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care.

Cindy Blackstock says that far more children are being placed in foster care today than in the days of residential schools because of poverty, unsanitary housing, and addictions. The marginalization of indigenous communities is not a thing of the past. The employment rate for indigenous youth is 6.2 points lower than for non-indigenous youth, and nearly 18.8% of the indigenous workforce, or one in five people, did not finish high school. Nearly one in five indigenous people is dealing with food insecurity, which explains the despair of young first nations and Inuit people.

In an article published earlier this month, Cindy Blackstock said:

[English]

Reconciliation means not saying sorry twice.

[Translation]

I hope the Liberal government will remember those words.

While young first nations people face a number of problems and a rather grim situation, a number of services exist across the country to help them, if we give them the means to access those services.

Consider the case of Akwesasne. Akwesasne Child and Family Services is very well regarded. The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne invited officials from the Court of Quebec, which has jurisdiction over files involving children, to come to the reserve and see the situation on the ground first-hand. That visit took place in 2015.

In other words, we can improve the lives of young indigenous people by working together. That is not a slogan; that is a fact. It is the duty of the House of Commons to remind the government of its obligation to right the wrongs of the past and not abandon another generation of first nations children.

That is why I am pleased to announce that the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne supports this motion. I am proud to vote in favour of this motion, and I hope all of my colleagues will do the same. When we talk about reconciliation and improving the lives of all Canadians, we have to think about first nations. We need to make sure that the Liberals keep the promises they made here in the House of Commons since the election, and those made during the election.

First nations people have endured enough suffering and discrimination. It must stop. The prejudice and fear of others must stop, so that mutual understanding and healthy relationships between communities can be fostered.

• (1235)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):
Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments.

[English]

I would like to ask my colleague about the historical investments our government has made, in the neighbourhood of \$8.6 billion, with respect to indigenous issues. I know we have taken some very important steps in the right direction. I certainly share my colleague's frustration with respect to what has happened, and what is still happening, in many communities.

I think we are at the foot of history, as I indicated before, to turn the tide. I want to know what kind of specific issues in the budget my colleague is optimistic about, and what more she thinks needs to be done in future years?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the Liberals are trying to show that there is an upside. There has only been one investment of \$71 million even though the tribunal had ordered \$216 million to be paid this year alone. The Liberals are unable to keep their promises. The Canadian government has systematically discriminated against 163,000 children. It has to stop saying that everything is fine and that first nations communities are doing well. Things are not going well.

As I mentioned, 50% of children living on indigenous reserves have suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide. That is one out of two children. I cannot even imagine that happening to my daughter. I believe that having one child in that situation is one child too many. This is happening because they do not have adequate services. Since the beginning of the year, the tribunal has issued two orders stating that the Liberal government is still not fulfilling its mandate to ensure that children are looked after and that they are given all the care they need. There is still a 2% cap on education and educational support. We have major problems and we have to start facing up to them. We must roll up our sleeves and provide first nations with the help they need.

The Liberals ran up \$30 billion in debt. What is another \$150 million on top of \$30 billion? Nothing at all. It is an insignificant amount in the budget. Why is it so difficult to allocate these monies to help first nations? I do not understand it.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard in the chamber from the government side, which actually argued that it is abiding by Jordan's principle. I wonder if you could explain to the House and to the public what the difference is. Is it that Jordan's principle ought to apply to all aboriginal children, or is it just children who are deemed to have a disability, because that is what it is right now?

• (1240)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we answer the question, I just want to remind the hon. member that, even if someone is close to us, it is easy to talk directly to them, but members have to address their questions through the Chair.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue.

The Jordan principle was established in 2005 after Jordan River Anderson, a five-year-old boy with very complex needs, died in hospital. He waited to get help while the federal and provincial governments argued over who would pay for his care.

The Jordan principle applies to all children who need services. Under this principle, children must be given the services they need without having to wait to find out whether their case falls under federal or provincial jurisdiction, in order to prevent other children from dying while waiting for an answer.

If the Liberals support the Jordan principle, why are they going to court to challenge the need for orthodontic care, for example? Those

services cost \$800 and the court case cost \$32,000. It does not make any sense.

[English]

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I'm standing in the House today because first nation, Métis, and northern children are hurting. Their families and communities are struggling to make ends meet. They are denied culturally appropriate services. For example, when dealing with children and youth in care, their first languages of Cree, Dene, Michif, and other languages are not even considered and validated in trying to get support for the families.

The realities of northern Saskatchewan are rarely and barely recognized. I represent almost half of the province of Saskatchewan, geographically speaking. For example, northern residents have to travel long distances from home to their destinations. In Sandy Bay in my riding, the community has been struggling with a suicide epidemic for the last decade. The families often travel between six and eight hours to reach Saskatoon, so that they can obtain the required help.

Fond du Lac First Nation is a fly-in reserve in my riding. The cost of the airfare either to Prince Albert or Saskatoon is very expensive. The cost of living, the cost of buying healthy food such as fruits and vegetables, is very expensive. Families simply cannot afford to support their children, youth, and elders.

This year, the grocery store in Pelican Narrows first nation burned to the ground. Since then, the reserve and the nearby communities have no access to groceries because The North West Company has delayed its commitment to rebuild the store. In the meantime, in order to buy groceries, the vast majority of the residents must travel long distances. Imagine; the children and youth are hungry on a daily basis.

Since we have been speaking loudly about the challenges that indigenous communities face in northern Saskatchewan, my office has been receiving phone calls, emails, Facebook and Instagram messages, and correspondence from youth and their families who are eager to share their painful, heartbreaking stories with me. For example, I have been in touch with families and neighbours who are painfully impacted by the most recent four suicides in Stanley Mission and Deschambault Lake first nations. The youngest, 10 years old, died last Tuesday while we await the final rulings on the cause of these terrible tragedies.

We must ask ourselves what our children see. Do indigenous children, girls in particular, see a country that champions their intrinsic importance, in both word and deed? When they watch the news and check their Facebook and Twitter feeds, do they see our various levels of government and those in positions of authority conveying the message that their lives are valued? Let us reflect on these questions as we consider the current state of the over-representation of indigenous children across the country and the high rates of missing and murdered indigenous women.

This is why I want to speak in favour of the opposition day motion presented by my colleague the member for Timmins—James Bay. I would like to thank him for his long-time advocacy for first nations and Métis children.

Business of Supply

Across Canada and specifically in my riding, first nations, Métis, and northern residents were very hopeful with the language that the Liberal Party was using. Elders were pleased to hear the words “nation to nation”. Children, youth, and their families placed high hopes in the words “real change”. A year later, those very elders and families are frustrated and questioning the Liberal government's commitment to nation-to-nation relationships with first nations, Métis, and northerners. Hope is fading away.

The government fails to acknowledge the sense of urgency in requiring services that our first nations, Métis, and northern communities face. When I was the mayor of the northern village of La Loche, I worked collaboratively with government agencies and the local schools on this very topic. Teenagers from 14 to 18 years of age who were in care, and still are, either go from home to home or they are literally homeless. When I was the chair of the New North association, the mayors and councils of 34 municipalities would share similar stories.

● (1245)

The majority of these children and youth have treaty cards, so they are considered first nations people who live in municipalities. What that means is that they have very little or no support.

This brings me to the topic of the shortage of foster homes in my riding. When a child is apprehended, he or she is either placed in a home that is overcrowded or is taken out of the community to where a foster home is found. For example, when I visited Hatchet Lake First Nation a few months ago, it was shared with me that there was a home that sheltered 21 individuals, including small children. What is more, the foster families support group in northern Saskatchewan has been continuously asking for support to train and work with foster families, to this day.

The court ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on January 25 was clear. The Canadian government was found guilty of racially discriminating against tens of thousands of first nations children by systematically underfunding federal services. The tribunal's ruling called on the Liberal government for immediate, medium-term, and long-term reforms so that children could receive the treatment they deserve. They are innocent children who deserve to feel to safe, to be cared for, and to feel valued, and they deserve to have the same opportunities as everyone else.

In not appealing the decision, the Liberal government accepted all the legal obligations placed on it. However, two compliance orders have been put out by the court because the government has failed to meet its legal and moral obligations to first nations children. In fact, instead of meeting the obligations ordered by the court, the current government has continued to fight first nations children in court.

I ask this again: Where is the commitment to a nation-to-nation relationship the current government promised to uphold, when there is a clear lack of urgency to act on this court ruling?

Speaking of broken promises, failing to comply with the court ruling is in direct disregard of the TRC's call to action on child welfare. This first call to action demands that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments reduce the number of indigenous children in care in Canada. It stipulates that governments provide “adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-

welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside”.

Now the tribunal has found that the federal government was discriminating against 163,000 first nations children in its delivery of child-welfare services on reserves. The cumulative outcome of this intentional and discriminatory practice has led to children being removed from families to foster homes and to frequently languishing in non-indigenous child-welfare systems.

One example is the case of Maryann Napope from One Arrow First Nation, who has been fighting for several years to get custody of her grandchildren. There is nothing she would like more than to reunite with them and take care of them, but the foster system has failed her and her family. Her grandchildren were put up for adoption without the consent of the mother. They fell through the cracks of the child foster system. She said that she is committed to continuing to fight to be reunited with her grandchildren. This is one story among many others.

In fact, in Saskatchewan alone, 87% of children in foster care are indigenous. This is a number that is very concerning and could be reduced if the current government adopted once and for all the Jordan principle, as ordered by the tribunal. At its heart, the principle states that first nations children should be able to access the same government services as non-indigenous children and that we must not allow jurisdictional disputes to get in the way of providing services to children.

● (1250)

I would like to conclude by saying that I will be supporting my colleague's motion on Tuesday, and I invite this House to unanimously vote for the motion. A vote for the motion is a vote for first nations children, for their safety, and for their recognition. Parliament must step in and order the government to fix this historic wrong, because we cannot fail another generation of first nations children.

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first nations communities and indigenous people are indeed suffering some of the worst tragedies right across the country.

In her party's platform, the New Democrats stated that they would try to balance the budget. They say that the Liberals are not spending money on first nations. I respectfully disagree with that.

How would the NDP invest in first nations education at the same time as balancing the budget?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Mr. Speaker, it is heartbreaking and very sad that a sitting government that is supposed to support first nations children, Métis, and northerners across Canada finds ways to not support the tribunal ruling or the services and programs that are so very needed, not only on reserves but in Métis municipalities across Canada.

Regardless, the Liberals formed the government last year. They have the responsibility. When the Prime Minister of Canada speaks about nation to nation, the children, youth, families, and elders look to him for real change. That is what the children, the youth, and the families in my riding look for.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in its first 100 days, the Liberal government spent \$4.3 billion outside of Canada, but it could not find \$155 million to fund the ruling we are talking about today.

I wonder if my colleague could talk a little bit about that fact and also about the fact that there seem to be inconsistencies across the board in the Liberal caucus, such as with the transparency act. The Liberals are refusing to enforce it. It seems to be a complete undermining of the law.

• (1255)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Mr. Speaker, it is very sad to have this discussion. When I go to my riding or get a phone call, it is from a mum or a dad who failed to get services for their kid who just tried to commit suicide.

For all the tragedies we have faced, here we are again. Canada was built in 1867. We are having the same arguments, because first nations, Métis, and northerners do not have the same equality as the rest of Canada.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very heartfelt and grounded comments. We really value her expertise and her experience in this area.

I have just found out that the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations has endorsed the call by the Human Rights Tribunal to mediate the dispute about the call for action by the government. They would like to have a mediation to actually resolve what is specifically required to be transferred and to establish a protocol and immediate needs-based funding to eliminate the discrimination found by the tribunal.

It sounds like a very sensible approach, and I wonder if the member agrees that maybe the government could step up to the plate. Instead of consulting, why does it not actually sit down at the mediation table?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister visited my community of La Loche during the horrific tragedy, the Prime Minister stood before us in the community and said that whatever we need, the government would provide for us.

I heard about the recent suicides and what the Prime Minister and the government said. The reality is that it places barriers in place, and there is discrimination. It does not act on the real solutions that first nations, the Métis communities, and municipalities and northerners are asking for.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all those in the House of Commons today who have contributed to this important debate on children in first nations communities across Canada. I want to add my voice to this debate as well.

Business of Supply

Our government promised a new relationship with indigenous people and a commitment to work in partnership to resolve the important issue of discrimination that has impacted indigenous people for generations, especially children.

We on this side of the House are grateful for this debate today, because once again, we can bring to light the issues and the need to reform first nations child and family services programs. This is a goal of our government, one we take seriously, and one we are determined to do. I can assure all colleagues in the House today that we recognize, as a government, that this is urgent work that requires urgent attention.

Our priority is, first and foremost, the well-being of children, and we remain committed to working collaboratively to implement the orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, which have been stated in the motion provided by the member today. We have made very clear our commitment to improve the outcomes for first nation communities, which is why we have welcomed the tribunal's decision and have worked diligently in partnership to address the orders that have been outlined.

We will not defend the actions of former governments. We will not defend the neglect created by former governments as it relates to indigenous people. Our government is looking forward. We are looking forward to addressing these urgent and important needs of first nations children and first nations communities.

We know that essentially we have a system of child welfare and family services for first nations people in this country that is broken, and it needs to be overhauled. I was hoping today, in the motion presented by the member opposite, that he would speak to the fact that there needs to be a full reform of this system, because I know that he believes that it needs to happen.

Our government believes that meaningful change for first nations children and families can only be successful if all partners are included in developing this path forward, including first nations youth, first nations leadership, first nations children, first nations families, key organizers, service providers, federal departments, and provincial and territorial government departments.

We are committed to a full-scale reform of the program developed with and for first nations, and we are reaching out to all those partners in the country to encourage their contribution and those options for reform. This includes reaching out to members in the legislature, and that is why this debate has become important today in seeking that feedback.

Our government is committed to changing the status quo, and we are taking action to ensure that we get this right for first nations children and families. They deserve to have a government that is not only committed to reforming and transforming child welfare and family services for first nations in this country but that will take action, seek their input, and get this right for them. It is time in this country that we shape reform that is going to benefit the people who really need it.

Business of Supply

For far too long, decisions have been made top down. That is why we have the situation we do in this country today. It is why many first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities across our country feel that they have been neglected. Realistically, they have been, not just their children but their communities as a whole. They deserve a government that realizes the urgency of this issue, and they have one in us.

Immediately, this year, we moved to make investments for children and families on reserve. We knew that the investments were needed and urgent.

• (1300)

Through budget 2016, we have made significant investments into first nations children and family service programs with nearly \$635 million over five years in new funding, including \$71 million this year for immediate urgent relief focused on providing additional prevention services in each province and in the Yukon territory. That was a historic move. It had never happened in any prior government but it happened in this government in less than 12 months because we take our job and our obligations to the indigenous children and indigenous people of this country seriously. We are acting.

In addition to that, through the first nations child and family services program, we have committed urgent investments of up to \$382 million over the next three years to implement a new approach to Jordan's principle. This new approach will include enhanced service coordination and a service access resolution fund. These steps will ensure that first nations children have access to the care and supports they need, and that Canada can effectively respond to first nations children and their needs.

I could speak for a lengthy period of time on this issue. However, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Centre. I know this is an issue that she is also very passionate about. However, before I finish, there are a couple of things I want to say.

In a country like Canada, there should be no ruling in any court that says that racial systemic discrimination and discriminatory actions toward aboriginal children exist. It is a shameful ruling for any court to have to make in this country. We will be the first government to step up to address this and to ensure that systemic discrimination against children, whether first nations, on or off reserve, Inuit, or Métis, no longer occurs in this country.

The courts made this ruling because of the former government, which for 10 years under Prime Minister Harper did not see the value of investing in first nations, Inuit, and Métis children in this country, in the communities in which they lived, or even in the people who make up those many communities across our country. It continued to cut funding, not improve it. It continued to ignore the plight that children were underfunded and left in poverty in these communities. It is only the government of the day that is stepping up to ask for real reform and to lead real reform in child welfare and family services in this country for first nations people.

We on this side of the House believe that no government should use the court to fight children, but that is what happened with the former government. The Conservatives might have great speeches and a change of heart today, but it is disappointing to know that they also fought these children in court so that they would not have to

increase funding to first nations and indigenous children in this country.

We are committed to reform. We are committed to supporting first nations. We will keep working toward that goal. We will keep working to help indigenous families and children.

In my riding, we talk about residential schools and removing children out of communities and we talk about the sixties scoop, but today I look around and there are more children in care in the communities that I represent and many other indigenous communities across the country than we have ever seen before. We have to stop this. We have to help children stay in their own communities, help families stay together, and help children grow up in the culture they are a part of.

I see too many children being taken away or sent away, where non-indigenous families get more money to care for indigenous children than indigenous families do. These are the things we have to fix. This is what we have committed to fix.

I am proud of the work that our government has done for children in first nations, and Inuit and Métis people in this country. We will keep doing it.

• (1305)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the parliamentary secretary's passion for this particular issue.

I just wanted to bring light to the fact that the Liberal plan in the last election relied on \$1.7 billion of pre-existing funding over the 2016-17 period to the 2019-20 period, despite no existence of that funding in three primary sets of government fiscal documents; that is, the main estimates, public accounts, and the reports on plans and priorities.

The government only has so much time left in which it can keep on blaming these problems on the previous Conservative government. It has now been in power for a year. It is time to step up to the plate.

With that in mind, I would like to get the parliamentary secretary's reactions to, first, the unanimous adoption of the motion by the Manitoba legislature yesterday, which identified that the funding gap still exists. We have a full legislature voting on this. Second, I would also like to know whether she will be voting in favour of our motion. I would like to have a clear and definitive answer because sometimes there is a very long gap between Liberal promises and actions.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, actually. However, I think it is worthy to state in the House that we are the government that has accepted the rulings and the recommendations of the tribunal. We are the government that is moving to implement those. We know that this is an urgent issue. That is why we stepped up immediately to invest \$71 million in child services on reserve and to immediately accept Jordan's principle, investing another \$34 million in children to ensure another 900 children on reserve get the care and the investment they require.

Business of Supply

I think it goes without saying that as a government we are implementing every one of those issues that are called for in the motion today.

The member is asking us to arbitrarily take a number out of the air and say that this is the amount of money we should invest in children on reserve. However, the tribunal is saying we should invest what is needed. As a government, that is exactly what we should do.

• (1310)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly, I wish I had more time than just questions and answers to defend some very important things that we did that moved forward, specifically, human rights legislation applying on reserve.

More important, the parliamentary secretary talked at length about the partnership and how we had to move forward in partnership. I also noticed, this morning, that the minister announced a new special representative. Therefore I have two questions.

First, was there a conversation with the AFN and other groups, in terms of their moving forward with that specific appointment of a representative?

Second, would she stand in the House and claim that the funding that is out there right now is absolutely acceptable and there is no need for a cash infusion in order to make sure that indigenous children in Canada have the same services and the right to same services as those off reserve?

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the member did ask about the minister's special representative because it gives me an opportunity to talk about the fact that this individual is a very prominent individual in our country, a prominent advocate for indigenous people, and is actively involved in many related initiatives across the country. She was also recently named as the chair on truth and reconciliation at Lakehead University.

Let me just say this. The special representative will conduct this work on behalf of the minister and the government to look at this nation-to-nation relationship with first nation communities. She will engage with a number of key partners, including first nations, youth leadership, national and regional organizations, service providers, provinces, and the Yukon Territory.

Based on this engagement process, the individual will advise the minister in concrete ways on how to reform the first nations child and family services program. We believe that this engagement is critical to the reform of child and family services programs for first nations people in Canada.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to be part of this very important dialogue today on first nations children. I want to focus my remarks on their health and well-being and the government's efforts to improve the health and well-being of indigenous children and their families off reserve, but I also wanted to answer some of the other questions that have been put forward by the opposition.

Children are the future of our communities, we know that, and it is critical for us to create positive environments for them that support and encourage their full potential both physically, mentally, and culturally as well as intellectually. We know that indigenous people

are young and their numbers are growing at a substantially faster rate than non-indigenous populations in Canada. In fact, in 2011, there were over 120,000 indigenous children in Canada under the age of six and more than 75% of the indigenous population in Canada live off reserve.

We know that indigenous populations are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, family violence, disability, high rates of chronic and infectious disease, and suicidal ideation. Within this context we have to work together to support these children. I want to stress the word "together". We, all levels of government, indigenous peoples, and non-governmental organizations have to work together to support the positive health and resiliency of all indigenous children. We have to build systems and supports so that indigenous children are well supported and have healthy families and healthy communities.

Our government recognizes that investing in a child's development at the earliest years leads to greatly improved health outcomes over the long term. That is why we have and are investing \$112 million a year in programs to support the health and development of vulnerable children and their families off reserve.

We have a community action program for children, a Canadian prenatal nutrition program, and the aboriginal head start program in urban and non-urban communities, which if I recall, came about during the Chrétien government in 1994, so that has been going for quite a while. These help to equip children to be ready for school, to help children live healthier lives, and to help them have strong mental health throughout the course of their lives. These three programs support family prevention, health promotion, and activities that focus on the vulnerable populations in communities, especially in urban areas where there are urban aboriginal children who we know are at great risk.

The community action program for children and the Canadian prenatal nutrition program, which also helps postpartum mothers, have shown to be experiencing a great deal of good outcomes, so we want to continue with those. The programs address key areas that determine future health outcomes such as healthy child development, nutrition, food security, injury prevention, physical activity, parenting, and mental health promotion.

I would be one of the first to say that even though these programs have achieved some measure of success, they still have not brought us to where we want to go with regard to the best and optimal outcomes for first nations children. These programs offer us a great deal of data and a key platform for transferring evidence-based practices and health knowledge to vulnerable communities, so they act as education and awareness programs that help reach populations that are at high risk in broader health care systems and other systems.

Business of Supply

These programs provide social support as well as health support and they help to promote the health and social development of women and their children. Many families we know who use these programs, especially in indigenous communities, face challenging life circumstances such as low income, lone parenthood, social or geographic isolation, living in far-flung areas, and situations of violence, neglect, and tobacco or substance abuse or addiction. All of these present specific challenges that we need to deal with and all of these are actually inherent in the whole history of indigenous peoples and in the way that they have been treated throughout their lifetimes. Getting over that kind of systemic history is a really important challenge and an important part of what we do.

All this does affect the ability of young children to grow up to be participating adults, to grow up to be strong adults full of self-confidence. We still know that there are many other systems that challenge this happening. This is all systemic, so health and social programs alone will not make a difference. It is about educating communities across this country to understand the realities of the lives of indigenous peoples, which impact their children, their families, and their ability to succeed.

● (1315)

Talking about institutions that continue to harbour systemic racism and discrimination against aboriginal people, these are at the heart of what we have to change. It is a very difficult system to turn around. We are working at it and will continue to work at it because we are committed to this.

We know that some programs are helping in the meantime. The Canada prenatal nutrition program is in about 2,000 communities across Canada, representing about 50,000 pregnant women and caregivers who look after children. We are looking at encouraging breastfeeding, higher levels of nutrition, better prenatal care, vitamins to help reach good outcomes in pregnancy, and are looking at reducing alcohol intake and smoking, and at improved maternal health, because we know that good maternal health creates healthy babies and healthy children.

There are six core components, including health promotion, education, school readiness, nutrition promotion, and protection of indigenous language and culture. That is a really important part of what has happened to aboriginal people over the history of this country. They have lost a sense of identity. They have been told that being indigenous, using their language and culture, and beginning to feel free to adopt their cultural practices was wrong and primitive.

Now we have to recognize that it is an important part of getting aboriginal families and children moving forward. It is important to provide these in urban settings, where aboriginal children are just parts of a population and have a tendency to get lost in the shuffle. They go to school and are discriminated against by peers. They go to school and are not ready.

It is a really important commitment that our government has made. It is somewhat like turning the *Titanic* around in the Rideau Canal. We have such a long way to go. We have so many systems and institutions to try to change. This does not mean that we will not do it, but it does mean it is going to take a longer time to build the partnerships and to educate society as a whole.

At 133 sites across Canada, for example, we are providing this kind of funding for indigenous community-based organizations to help them have daycare systems and programming that will reach parents and children. We are reaching out to some of the most vulnerable children in Canada through this program.

Having been heavily involved with urban aboriginal issues in my city of Vancouver, I know this is really important. We have to get into the schools and the school board system to recognize the needs of aboriginal children. Through some of these programs and head start our government is helping to change the impact on and outcomes for aboriginal kids.

We need to look at how children who participate in aboriginal head start in urban areas can in fact demonstrate that they can do well in school, and will stay in school, including secondary school, and eventually look at perhaps having post-secondary training and education of some kind.

We need to continue to recognize that cultural behaviours and indigenous language acquisition are key parts of helping aboriginal children grow up to be strong, self-sufficient, and self-confident in this country.

I know the opposition motion today talks about commitments to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling. I have focused on health because I am a physician, and this is what I know and what I see. We know that healthy children, mentally and physically, will grow up to be adults who can change their lives.

Nonetheless, I want members to know that as a government we have welcomed, accepted, and are currently putting in place and forming partnerships, are making the necessary changes needed to be able to implement infrastructure, physical and/or social, and are working with other levels of government to implement the tribunal's orders. We are committed to this.

● (1320)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague is willing to work with the tribunal, then there should not be a problem with this motion.

What I am sensing is that the Liberal government has a problem with priorities. When it came time to rubber-stamp the Site C permits, despite the questions by people from Treaty No. 8 that this ran roughshod over their legal rights, the permits were rubber-stamped immediately, as was the pipeline through the Great Bear Rainforest, because it was a priority.

However, when it came time to meeting the compliance orders of the Human Rights Tribunal, after nine months, the government has announced that it is going to have an online survey and put someone out on the road to do consultations. That might be great for the Liberals, but the question I have is this. Why is she consulting with the first nations when her government is refusing requests for mediation by the Human Rights Tribunal, by Cindy Blackstock, and by Chief Perry Bellegarde of the Assembly of First Nations, who has told her government to come to the table for mediation?

Business of Supply

What we hear very clearly is that the Liberals believe they are above the law of the land, that Liberals can appoint people to go around and talk on their behalf, that they can set up an online system, and that they can continue to delay compliance with the Human Rights Tribunal ruling. Meanwhile, they are refusing mediation at the tribunal level.

Are the Liberals going to support this motion or do they believe that the Prime Minister is above the law of the land, while indigenous children are left below the law of the land?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, this is interesting because what we are doing now is politicizing this issue. We have seen in the House, very recently, the parties leaving aside partisanship and coming together in common cause for the common good.

As we have heard here, we are working on this. In fact, we have appointed Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux as the minister's special representative responsible to lead a national engagement process and to provide advice on how we are to get there. We are getting there.

Cutting through centuries' old systems takes time. It is not about political will. It is not about intent. In fact, the claim that someone went ahead and rubber stamped things and does not have this as a priority is wrong. The Prime Minister made this his first priority.

If we look at Jordan's principle, it speaks to the fact that for generations we have had provincial and federal governments who do not talk to each other and do not decide whose decision and jurisdiction this is. That is where we have to start, making sure that we get partnerships that are practical and pragmatic and will get the job done.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her insight on the health of first nations children and the importance of ensuring good health and protection for children in indigenous Canada.

She mentioned Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux and the work she will be doing on behalf of the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We know that her task is to create really meaningful change in the system of child and family care in Canada. Does the member feel that reform of the entire child welfare system is the real need on Canada's agenda to be able to make this right for indigenous children?

• (1325)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question goes to the heart of what we are trying to do and the difficult systems we are trying to change.

In another life, in another session, when I chaired the status of women committee, we travelled to look at the fate of women and girls in aboriginal communities across the country. We heard that in provincial welfare and child and family systems, when a woman left a violent situation and came into the city, she was immediately at a disadvantage. She got less welfare payments from the province to nourish her family. She would not know what to do. Then those children would be taken away from her and be given to non-indigenous families, who would then get the full amount of money to give those children the benefits they needed.

We heard this from provincial bureaucrats in camera, so that we would know that the system was so broken. It is because we do not talk to each other and do not work together to create a seamless system that would assist these women and children.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to address the motion before us today.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for North Island—Powell River.

If we had been alive 109 years ago, we would have opened what is now the *Ottawa Citizen* to find a report by a leading public health physician who had just surveyed the health of children in residential schools. His data included one school whose records showed that 76% of its children had died. At that time in 1907, the Department of Indian Affairs gave less money to fight tuberculosis among all first nations people than was allocated to the City of Ottawa. The report proved that the government knew how poorly aboriginal people were being treated but did nothing to remedy the inequality.

It is heartbreaking that 109 years later we are having the same debate in this place. We are here because in January of this year, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal issued a landmark legally binding ruling finding that the Government of Canada racially discriminates against 163,000 first nations children. That discrimination takes the form of unequal child welfare services on reserve, as well as the failure of the government to give aboriginal children equal access to public services without their falling victim to government red tape. The government has said that it will not appeal that decision, and I applaud it for that, but those are just words. What the children of this country desperately need is action.

It is worth remembering how we arrived here. Over the late 1990s government data showed that the number of aboriginal children going into child welfare had risen 71% over a six-year span because the government had failed to invest in prevention services to keep children safely at home. By 2000 a government report found that children on reserve received 78¢ on the dollar for what non-aboriginal children received. Rather than taking real action, the government commissioned another report. The new report showed that aboriginal children were getting even less. By then it was just 70¢ on the dollar.

That same year, 2005, a young boy was sitting in hospital in Manitoba. Just five-years old, Jordan Anderson had been born with serious health problems. After two years in hospital, his health had stabilized and he was ready to go home for the first time. Most children in this situation would be released to their home with the provincial government looking after their health care expenses, but Jordan Anderson was an aboriginal child and so he remained in hospital as Ottawa and the Province of Manitoba argued over who would pay for his care. While the governments argued, Jordan died, never having spent a day at home.

Business of Supply

It is in his memory that we are calling on the government today to fully implement Jordan's principle. This principle is one that would be self-evident to every Canadian, that in disputes between governments over a child's care, the child comes first and the red tape comes second. That means that we pay for a child's health care costs first and then let the adults argue over whose budget should cover it. However, as I will address in a moment, Jordan's principle, which is crystal clear to Canadians, is somehow still controversial to the Liberal government. Dealing with this issue was number three of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, which the Liberal government has pledged to fully implement.

Two years after Jordan Anderson died in hospital, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada filed a case against the Government of Canada with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Within 30 days of filing that challenge, the Harper Conservatives cuts the society's core funding. The society had to reduce its staff by half, do its own janitorial work and the like, but it did not give up. It kept going.

• (1330)

On January 29 of this year, its perseverance finally paid off. I would like to read the words of the tribunal's legally binding ruling. It states, "First Nations children and families living on reserve and in the Yukon are discriminated against in the provision of child and family services" by the federal government. The aim, it said, was not to punish the government but to end that discrimination.

Section 53 of the Canadian Human Rights Act allows the tribunal to order a person found to be discriminating on grounds including race to cease discrimination and to take immediate measures to redress the grievance or prevent future discrimination and to make available to the victims, as quickly as possible, "the rights, opportunities or privileges" that were denied by the racial discrimination.

We have an administrative tribunal making a binding order. Unless and until a binding order of a tribunal is overturned on judicial review or appealed successfully to a court, that is the law of the land. We are not here to talk about whether we comply with it any more than we are here to talk about whether we comply with a court order in a criminal matter. That is the law, unless and until it is overturned by a higher court of authority. There was no such ruling.

Under the authority of that order, the tribunal issued this order to the Government of Canada. It states, "(Indigenous Affairs) is ordered to cease its discriminatory practices and reform [its programs]...to reflect the findings of this decision". Indigenous Affairs was also ordered to cease applying its narrow definition of Jordan's principle and to take measures to "immediately implement the full meaning and scope of Jordan's Principle". That is the binding order of a Canadian administrative tribunal.

It is because the government has failed to take the actions that were ordered, despite two failures to comply with other orders in April and September, that we brought this motion today to the Parliament of Canada. After all, it is in this chamber that the elected representatives of Canadians voted in 2007 to fully adopt Jordan's principle. It was crystal clear.

One of those compliance orders issued against the government noted that Parliament applied the principle to all first nations children, not just those living on reserves, and the government's narrower definition "will likely create gaps for First Nations children and is not in line with the Decision."

I want to read the most recent compliance order to see if members can pick up any ambiguity in its order. It states, "...consistent with the motion unanimously adopted by the House of Commons, the Panel orders INAC to immediately apply Jordan's Principle to all First Nations children...".

Cindy Blackstock once said that government, by its actions, was saying that the government was above the law and first nations children were below it. A vote to support the NDP motion today is about to end that now. It is a vote to equalize the gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children. It is a vote for the principle that, as Canadians, we will set aside our differences and care for our children first. A vote is to stop needlessly fighting families in court, and that clearly has to be addressed immediately.

Refusing to obey the orders of a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal is simply not an option for the government. They are legally binding, they are morally binding, and more delay, more consultations, and more reports will not fix it. We have to do better. We have to do better for the children of Canada, all children, non-aboriginal and aboriginal alike.

• (1335)

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague on his passion for this subject.

I am part of the indigenous committee and the study we are doing right now on suicide helps us understand the crises that exist in many of our indigenous communities. Our government has committed significant funds, \$684 million, to the children and families fund to help deal with the crisis existing in our indigenous communities.

More important, if there is one thing we have come to understand in our committee, it is that only through a nation-to-nation relationship that leads to indigenous people establishing the priorities of their communities, and defining and implementing the programs associated with those priorities, are we really going to come up with the long-term solutions that are going to benefit all indigenous communities. Would the member opposite not agree that is where we need to get to?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, of course I agree that a nation-to-nation relationship is desperately required. I salute the expenditure of money that was noted and the efforts to prevent suicide, a crisis that is ripping through aboriginal communities. While those expenditures are warranted, there is a still a shortfall, according to Cindy Blackstock, of some \$155 million, which is at issue in our motion.

Business of Supply

I do not want to squabble about money, and I do not want to say that we should not be grateful that the government is spending money on such an obviously important area of concern, the welfare of aboriginal children in our country. However, there is a funding shortfall in child welfare services, which is estimated to be \$216 million. In the last budget, the government apparently spent \$71 million, which leaves Cindy Blackstock to conclude that there is a \$155 million shortfall.

Should we be doing more with respect to the prevention of suicide in first nation communities? Absolutely. Is the government spending money? Absolutely. However, we are here to talk about this motion, these children, and Jordan's principle right now. To not obey the law of the land is simply unacceptable.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note the conversation is going regularly to the \$684 million, but it is important to point out how it is very much back loaded. I believe over half the funds are actually for after 2019, which will be the next election. I would ask my colleague to comment on that.

An announcement was made by the minister about having a special representative to look at the overall system issues, but it is my understanding that there was no consultation with the AFN on what it would do in this appointment. In the member's opinion, is that consistent with the Liberals' said commitment to nation-to-nation?

• (1340)

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, it is funny. The statistics on how much money is being spent and whether it is back loaded and the like will be cold comfort to an aboriginal mother or father today who happens to be watching what we are doing in the House. Of course, there is a lot of money at play, and the numbers to an ordinary Canadian must seem very baffling. However, what is not baffling is that there is an order by a court. It is an administrative court, but a court all the same, a tribunal, which has two or three times had to tell the government to get its act together and obey the law. This is what I am having trouble understanding.

Having visited aboriginal communities in Yukon and British Columbia, and being a treaty negotiator for 10 years and having seen the tragedy up front, I do not want to talk about numbers. I want to talk about justice. I want to talk about why the government is not complying with the law. That is what I think the main issue is, and the numbers can follow.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to stand in the House today to speak to a motion that outlines the very core importance of making indigenous children a priority in Canada.

Today I speak in remembrance of my Granny Minnie, who spent years of her life in residential school at Lejac Indian Residential School, from the age of four to sixteen. She told me, "We cannot complain because we are still here. Never forget we are still here".

I also speak in remembrance of my father, who did not go to residential school but lived with the impacts every day, both in his family and in the world around him. He reminded me as a young girl that the cowboys and Indians shows were wrong, that actually the Indians were the good guys.

I speak for my husband, who went to residential school in Mission and who used to stare outside his window every day, looking at the river pretending it was the ocean where he grew up; who several years ago carved a beautiful mask called "Taking the Indian out of a child", which we know was the history of our country and now stands as a reminder to all the children who go to school at Southgate Middle School in Campbell River.

I also speak on behalf of my children and grandchildren, who have all come to speak to me about the racism they face in this world.

One particularly powerful story was of a time when my son, who was in grade four, was sat down during a library class. The teacher presented a picture and asked the children in the class to tell her about that picture. My son of course knew immediately that it was a group of children who were in residential school. What shocked him the most was the fact that none of the other students knew. When they looked at the picture of sad children, the other students had suggestions that maybe the children were sad because they had missed a field trip, or they did not get what they wanted for lunch. All that pressure and pain was growing in my son as he realized they did not know the history. He finally said, "Maybe it's because these are residential schoolchildren who want to go home to their families".

I also speak for my Auntie Dean, who is our hereditary chief from Stelako First Nation from, the Caribou Clan.

This summer, I and my staff, in our commitment to reconciliation, took part in a training at the Comox Bighouse, called "It Takes a Village". It is an experiential training that connects people who have not had the experience with what really happens to children when they go to residential school and, also important, what happens to communities when their children are gone.

I remember one of the elders telling me to think about it, to think about living in my community and every child between the ages of three and sixteen was suddenly gone and what that would do to my community. At that event, the elders gave me a feather that I keep in my desk. It reminds me that I speak on behalf of the people of North Island—Powell River. Therefore, I also stand here for Alberta Billy, James Quatell, Evelyn Voyageur, Mary Everson, Jo-Ann Restoule, Phil Umpherville, David Somerville, and the trainers Kathi Camilleri and Meredith Martin.

This history gives me a beautiful burden to speak to today's motion. What all of these important people have in common is that everything they do in their life is for the children. They know the children are our future. We need to reflect the reality in the House and make a real difference for these children who have suffered generation after generation. We have to be brave enough to stand up and say that we are willing to take the next step to ensure it stops here. It is time to make it clear in the House today that aboriginal children matter.

Business of Supply

Earlier this year, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the Canadian government racially discriminated against tens of thousands of first nations children in systemically underfunding federal services that put their lives at risk. Here is one of the most painful questions that so many indigenous people have shared with me, “When will our children matter?”

In fact, the court has already put out two compliance orders because the government is failing to meet its legal and moral obligations to first nations children.

• (1345)

With the government failing to respond to a court ruling on systemic racial discrimination of first nations children, we are here calling on Parliament to step in and order finally that this historic wrong be righted. We cannot fail another generation of first nations children.

The minister is talking about an overhaul of the child welfare system for indigenous people. The minister knows that we have heard this all before. How many more consultations and studies need to be done?

Every day in this House we talk about issues relating to indigenous people. I just want to take a moment to recognize the people who actually live there every single day and keep doing the work. They do not stop by for a visit. They do not go in to check if their research was done properly. They stay there every day and they see the compounded effects of residential schools, of colonization, and it is exhausting work. These people never give up. I cannot even imagine how hard that is.

The minister was a member of this chamber during the Chrétien years when two government commission reports documented the many shortfalls. There have been recommendations. Canada has never meaningfully implemented them. Instead, the Canadian government continues to do what it likes to do so much: commission another study, do some more consultation.

In 2005, there was a two-part study that found first nations children on reserve received approximately 70¢ on the dollar compared to non-aboriginal children. This was reiterated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action. This is what is being asked for:

3. We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

As Cindy Blackstock once said:

We need a government who is not going to just talk, that will actually act and alleviate that discrimination, because there are kids out there right now who are living in very difficult circumstances.

We are losing another generation of First Nations children to wayward federal policies and that has to stop.

The government has a shameful history of fighting families in courts. If no relationship is more important to the Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Youth, than with indigenous people, then the government must explain how it can possibly justify not immediately ending the racial discrimination of first nations children.

We have examples. Health care provides orthodontic care that is medically necessary. Requests are denied and appealed. I have the

privilege of raising beautiful indigenous children, and when we went to the orthodontists, they were very clear, saying that this would take at least three tries, that we should not be surprised; it would be denied every single time and then we would have to fight it. When a service provider tells us that, we know there is something seriously wrong.

First nations children are 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care due to poverty, poor housing, and addictions rooted in the trauma of residential schools. The cost of providing equal funding for child welfare for this year is estimated to be around \$260 million, identified by Cindy Blackstock, not the court.

Following the ruling, the Liberal budget of 2016 provided only \$71 million for this year. Not all of this money will be going directly to those on the ground. The Liberal government provided \$155 million less than Canada's legal and moral obligation to provide a year one for first nations children and child welfare, and did not even meet what was identified as needed in the Harper government.

We know it is time. There has been a real call to action. We have a history in this country that we need to make right, and we have to stop punishing children for decisions that were made a long time ago. How much more do we expect these communities to take? We need to fix it, and we need to fix it now.

• (1350)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the remarks of the member opposite. I want to remind her of a couple of things.

First, when we talk about a renewed relationship with indigenous people in this country, it has to be one that is shaped by a shared vision and a shared understanding of the way forward, not just by the top-down ideas from one party or one member in terms of how they think things should be done.

I want to be clear that this government is the first government to lead the recommendations of the tribunal ruling. We have acted on what the tribunal is saying, and we know the urgency of acting immediately for first nations children in this country. That is why in July of this year, shortly after we accepted the ruling, shortly after we redefined and accepted the definition of Jordan's principle, adding services for 900 more first nations children in the country, we also moved to invest immediately, urgently, \$382.5 million in child welfare and child services in this country.

Is that not acting for children of first nations communities in Canada?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I think it is very interesting. As somebody who grew up in this community, who works as an advocate, who has worked in multiple indigenous communities, I have a deep respect for a shared approach. I would argue that the current government and past governments tend not to listen as well as they could, and they are offering a top-down approach.

Business of Supply

I just have to say that they should spend longer than a day in those communities. I know this is a hard topic. I know it is a scary topic. However, when people live every single day in this, they understand it in a different way. It's not a visit that makes the difference.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Where does the member think I grew up?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I live on reserve, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to say that I appreciate some of the action that is happening. It is happening every day, but we still need to do better.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before going to the next question, I want to remind everyone that debate is taking place. It is nice to see everyone getting along cordially, but if they are talking and not whispering, they should please take it into the lobby.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. I really agree with her when she says the government is all talk and no action. It has been a year. With respect to murdered and missing aboriginal women, we have heard nothing. The government talked about helping indigenous children a year ago, but there is still nothing. With respect to mental health for indigenous people, there is still nothing.

I wonder if the member would comment.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would not agree that there has been no action. I think there has been some significant action and some steps that are moving in the right direction, and I appreciate that.

However, I think that the motion we are discussing today would take it to that next level. This is a very specific motion that is asking for very specific action.

It is also asking our government to stop taking children to court, to start doing the right thing, to let it go, and to do what needs to happen.

I appreciate the action. I appreciate the dedication of many members on that side. However, I also know that the motion is the right way to move forward.

● (1355)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her powerful remarks today. She raised the fact that she was raising indigenous children and was involved with an orthodontist who was in fact saying that certain treatments could not be available.

I would like her comments on the fact that, in a case for which information has been released under the Access to Information Act, a young Cree teenager needed emergency orthodontic care that cost \$8,000 and the government, under the legislation, has been shown to have spent \$32,000 taking the family to court on, I think, three occasions.

I would like to hear her perspective on that.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, it goes back to the key part, which is how we choose to spend the money. How do we choose to move forward?

We look at incidents like this—and I talked about taking my children in and being told right away that we would have to appeal.

It is a broken system; a system where we could do something more effective by actually spending the money in a meaningful way and not spending such a larger proportion in a different way.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

This is an important debate that we are engaging in today.

I come from a province in which child welfare has been a critical issue for many years. In fact, when I left the Manitoba legislature after serving for about 18 years, the child advocate's office declared that Manitoba was in a child care crisis. That is after many years of both Conservative and NDP performances.

The reason I say that is, when I look at what is being talked about today, I think what we are losing out on is the importance of working together with others in order to make sure the child is first and foremost and is given the biggest consideration, the most significant consideration.

I listened to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I can tell members that this is an individual, as a minister—and I have seen her when she was in opposition—who genuinely has a caring heart and attitude toward indigenous people and, in fact, all children.

I look at the resolution that has been brought forward by my New Democratic friends and I think it has fallen short on what I believe is a bigger issue, and we have heard members of this House talk about it. That is the real need for change, the need for real reform on this issue.

The serious nature and the magnitude of the problem cannot be underestimated.

I say all of this because I believe that this government has an excellent track record to date, and there is a lot more to be done.

Within the first couple of months of taking office, one of the first things we did was that the Prime Minister indicated we would have an inquiry into the 1,200-plus missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. That is something that I and many other members of this House have talked about and requested that the government to take action on for years inside this legislature. It was this Prime Minister, working with this cabinet, who ultimately made the decision within a couple of months of having the authority to call for the inquiry. That inquiry is of critical importance because through that inquiry we will get a better understanding of the plight of the children who we are talking about today.

I realize my time has expired.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for concluding for the moment. He will have seven minutes remaining for his speech following question period.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

•(1400)

*[English]***DIWALI**

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our celebration of Diwali is under way in Fleetwood—Port Kells, across our city of Surrey, and indeed all across Canada. Our Hindu and Sikh community celebrates Diwali to signify the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair. It is also a time of renovation and renewal for many.

What is so spiritually uplifting about Diwali for all of us is that it shares its theme with so many other faiths, the symbol of a divine light and the ultimate triumph of light over darkness, be it Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, or the lighting of the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar.

That is a wonderful aspect of our society here in Canada. We are stronger because of our differences, not in spite of them. In fact, we can all join in wishing our friends and neighbours a happy Diwali because, like them, all of us will in turn be lighting up our community with understanding, hope, tolerance, and peace.

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UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations agency created to celebrate education, science, and history has embarrassed and disgraced itself yet again, allowing itself to be used as a tool for hate.

At the annual meeting of UNESCO's annual world heritage committee, a resolution was passed that effectively denies Jewish and Christian ties to Jerusalem's Temple Mount, and that ignores the importance of Jerusalem to the three monotheistic religions that share its history.

As the site of two biblical temples, Temple Mount is the holiest place in Judaism, as well as the Muslim holy site of the al-Aqsa Mosque, al-Haram al-Sharif.

Denying the existence of the Jewish temples is only a blood libel step away from denying the existence of Jews. Canada must strongly protest and condemn this latest hateful manipulation of our shared history.

* * *

DIWALI AND BANDI CHHOR DIVAS

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to mark this year's festivities for Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas. On October 30, families across Canada will celebrate the festival of lights, awakening the night sky with sparkling diyas, lanterns, and firecrackers to remind us that light will always overcome darkness.

In my riding of Scarborough North, I am delighted to be joining residents at the Scarborough Gurdwara and at the ISKCON Scarborough Temple to observe one of the most beautiful traditions of the Indian subcontinent.

My parents were born and raised in Kolkata, India, before they immigrated to Canada over 40 years ago. As a Canadian of Hakka Chinese Indian descent, I am proud to live in a country where our diversity is our strength. Occasions like Diwali showcase our shared values of freedom, inclusion, and equality, and as Canadians we can all take a moment to celebrate.

Joyeux Diwali et Bandi Chhor Divas.

* * *

*[Translation]***NORTHERN ONTARIO BUSINESS AWARDS**

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, small businesses drive our economy. Entrepreneurs take a significant risk in starting a company, but when they are successful their company benefits the entire community.

That is why I am pleased to pay tribute to this year's winners of the Northern Ontario Business Awards.

[English]

Pat Dubreuil won entrepreneur of the year for the Relais-Magpie-Relay in Dubreuilville, which draws snowmobilers from across North America.

Birch Island's Waubetek Business Development Corporation won the first nations business award of excellence for its involvement in 3,000 aboriginal businesses.

Moonbeam's Northern Truss was named company of the year in the one to 15 employees category. Luc Bouchard mortgaged his home to start the business. Now it is the north's go-to outlet for the design and manufacturing of prefab and custom wood projects. The company's constant growth has created good, full-time jobs, along with work for students and seasonal employees. Contributions to schools, organizations, and sports teams show Northern Truss is a boon to the community.

I am sure all members will join me to congratulate these outstanding businesses for well-earned awards.

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AMERICAN-CANADIAN EXCHANGES

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I had the chance to meet students from the University of Vermont and Saint Michael's College to discuss our political system.

It is a great pleasure to see young Americans interested in Canadian politics.

[Translation]

Promoting trade with our neighbours to the south is very important to my riding, because it shares a border with Vermont. We have a special relationship with the United States and our border crossings should reflect that.

When I think about the automated border crossing pilot project underway at the Morses Line crossing in Saint-Armand, I think to myself that this is the future. It is important to facilitate trade between our two countries, even if that means relaxing border controls somewhat.

•(1405)

[English]

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I want to raise awareness on the current situation in Ethiopia.

Protests began in November 2015 after the central government attempted to infringe on the population's land rights, and these protests are still ongoing. Recently, 1,600 civilians have been detained for peacefully demonstrating against the government. Human Rights Watch says at least 500 people have been killed in clashes with security forces to date. This month, the government has declared a state of emergency, severely restricting the access of diplomats and cutting off Internet access.

While there is a lot that is unknown at this point regarding what is happening in Ethiopia, Canada should be monitoring this situation with concern. As members of Parliament in Canada, we need to call on the Ethiopian government to ensure that freedom, democracy, and human rights are protected in the region.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ethiopia.

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DIWALI AND BANDI CHHOR DIVAS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this October 30, over one billion Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists around the world will be celebrating Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas with their friends and family and their whole community.

Diwali is known as the festival of lights and one of the biggest celebrations for these faiths. It signifies the victory of light over darkness, hope over despair, and of freedom from oppression.

We as Canadians can take this message home with us and understand the importance of self-inquiry, self-improvement, and always trying to seek the good and right path. We must never forget to fight for others' freedoms and not just our own.

I am very proud to be Canadian because nowhere will we find people of all faiths and all beliefs coming together to celebrate each others' festivals. To my colleagues and all Canadians, I wish them a very happy and joyous Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas.

* * *

DIABETES

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to stand today as a co-chair of the all-party diabetes caucus. Today is diabetes on the Hill for the Canadian Diabetes Association, hence these pins.

I spent 18 years working in health care, especially as a diabetes educator and research coordinator. As an elected representative I am committed to speaking up about diabetes, which affects 11 million Canadians and can lead to serious complications. It is a burden on the health care system and on many families.

Statements by Members

On Tuesday, we had our first meeting of the diabetes caucus in partnership with the CDA. It was very productive. I thank all members for attending and invite everyone to join us for the next one.

I ask members to give a warm welcome to the Canadian Diabetes Association representatives here today. They are doing a great job.

* * *

[Translation]

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I really want to speak about Chaîne de vie, a project started by a student in my riding in collaboration with the Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup school board and Transplant Québec.

On October 16, the Chaîne de vie challenge took place on the occasion of World Day for Organ Donation and Transplantation in order to raise much-needed funds. The purpose of Chaîne de vie is to raise awareness and inform secondary school students about organ donation by providing them with accurate information and real testimonials. The goal is not necessarily to persuade them to sign up.

In Quebec, signing your health insurance card or registering with the Quebec health insurance plan (RAMQ) registry of consent is the first step. However, that is not enough. The family has the final say, so people need to speak with their families.

I truly admire Lucie Dumont, founder of this project, who has started the conversation. We must openly talk about organ donation with our families. I have signed my card. What about you, Mr. Speaker? I hope that Chaîne de vie will expand across Canada.

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DIWALI AND BANDI CHHOR DIVAS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 30, Sikhs, Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists around the world will gather to celebrate Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas.

[English]

This festival of light is a triumphant representation of good over evil, hope over despair, and knowledge over ignorance. For the over one million Canadians who practice Sikhism and Hinduism, Diwali is one of the most cherished days of the year.

[Translation]

In Canada and around the world, this is an opportunity for people to gather with their loved ones to celebrate their blessings.

[English]

Diwali is a remarkable testament to Canadian diversity and highlights our shared values of tolerance, respect, and compassion. This Sunday, diya lanterns will light homes and communities across this country in a spectacular celebration of light over darkness.

I join my community and others across the country in wishing a very happy Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas to all those celebrating with their families and loved ones.

Statements by Members

•(1410)

VANDALISM AT CALGARY MOSQUES

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, *as-salaam alaykum*.

I stand in the House today to denounce the acts of vandalism against Calgary mosques in Ranchlands and the Southeast Islamic Centre in Queensland, along with negative posters directed toward Muslims that have appeared in Calgary and Edmonton.

Islamophobia is a serious problem that makes many Canadians from the Muslim community feel unsafe and unwelcome. The people who are responsible for these acts must be brought to justice. We must also educate Canadians about the positive influence that members of the Muslim community have in building a stronger and more inclusive nation.

I stand in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters to offer my support to ensure they feel as welcome in this nation as all other Canadians.

* * *

FARMERS IN PEACE COUNTRY

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers in the Peace Country are some of the hardest working people in this country. During harvest, they start long before the sun rises and work continues until long after the sun sets. Farm families set everything aside to ensure that they can harvest the crops that they grow to feed the world.

This harvest has been very difficult. Wet weather has hindered operations throughout the Peace Country and much of the crop remains in the fields unharvested. I grew up on a farm so I know that there is always hope that the harvest will be completed, but I also know that if the harvest does not get done soon it will create incredible financial hardship for farm families across the Peace Country.

I will do everything in my power to ensure that this bad situation does not get worse. I will fight to ensure that the crop that has been harvested can get to rail transportation. I will also fight the Liberal plan to raise taxes on farm fuel, fertilizer, farm equipment, and grain transport.

We cannot make a bad situation worse.

* * *

DIWALI

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the house to speak about Diwali, a festival of lights and joy. The festival awakens our inner light of spirituality. True festivities and inner happiness come only if there is economic prosperity.

I compliment the government for its leadership role in the fields of innovation, science education, and economic development because these are the keys to our economic growth.

On behalf of Bramptonians, their council, and their members of Parliament, I thank the government for the Diwali gift of a new university in Brampton, which was long overdue. This university

will provide the best education for our kids and grandkids and prepare them for suitable jobs and the best living standards.

Let me wish all Canadians a happy Diwali and a happy Bandi Chhor Day.

* * *

MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many are growing concerned by recent statements by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change that she is, “as much an economic minister as I am an environment minister”. This is profoundly troubling because the Minister of Environment and Climate Change is the only voice mandated in cabinet to defend the environment. Her opinion contradicts the mandate of her ministry as clearly prescribed in law and her mandate letter.

The environment act precisely dictates her powers, duties, and functions to include the preservation and enhancement of the quality of the environment; renewable resources including migratory birds, flora, and fauna; water; meteorology; enforcement of laws on boundary waters and other transboundary matters; and ensuring environmental quality. No mention there of economic development.

The mandate letter issued by the Prime Minister reiterates these duties, adding the duty to act to combat climate change, pursue clean energy and environmental agreements, and complete robust species recovery. There is no mention of any duty to balance environmental protection with economic development.

Why has the minister now chosen to undermine her clearly prescribed environmental mandate?

* * *

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks International Religious Freedom Day. As Canadians, we rarely have had to worry about threats to our right to believe and practise our faith.

However, we increasingly find basic freedoms, such as freedom of religion, under threat around the world. An astounding 76% of the world's population faces some sort of persecution for their beliefs.

Last week, MPs continued to debate what Canada's response should be to the genocide faced by the Yazidi religious minority. Conflict has forced them from their ancient home on Mount Sinjar. Their villages have been destroyed, men have been tortured and killed, and women and girls have been sold into sexual slavery, all for little more than their faith.

There are also lesser known cases of those who suffer for their beliefs, such as the Baha'is in Iran, Falun Dafa in China, the Rohingya of Myanmar, and Christians in over 60 countries.

As lawmakers and Canadians, let us take a moment to remind ourselves of how blessed we are to enjoy the basic freedoms we take for granted. Today on International Religious Freedom Day, let us reaffirm our support for this most fundamental human right.

* * *

● (1415)

DIWALI

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to observe Diwali, the Festival of Lights, and Bandi Chhor Divas, festivals celebrated by Sikhs and Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists around the world.

This weekend, Gurdwara Sikh Sangat and Gauri Shankar Mandir in Brampton West will host Diwali prayers, celebrations, and firework displays. During Diwali, it is important to reflect on how we can incorporate compassion, forgiveness, and kindness in our lives. As we light our divas with our families and friends, I encourage Canadians to think about how we can introduce light into the lives of others.

To all those celebrating in Brampton West, across Canada, and around the world, happy Diwali and Bandi Chor Divas.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before being elected, the Prime Minister repeatedly called for the Canadian Forces missions in Iraq and Syria to be “open and transparent”, but yesterday in the House, he admitted that it was his order to suppress information about our mission in Iraq. He is suppressing information, not for the safety of our troops, but because he claims they are on a training mission when they are not. They are in combat.

Since the mission has changed and expanded, does the Prime Minister not think that Parliament, Canadians, and the families of the soldiers have a right to know?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the role that our Canadian Forces are performing in Iraq to defeat Daesh. Our training, advise, and assist role is an extremely important one to the coalition, as well as the other roles we are fulfilling.

We are doing our job at the moment within the coalition. It is important that we do not jeopardize the operational security of our forces, considering that Daesh is an extremely sophisticated organization in gathering intelligence. We have to protect our troops.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that line is ridiculous. To not give information to Parliament, Canadians, and the families of soldiers after the fact, after the missions, is ridiculous.

Oral Questions

Parliament has a right to know, Canadians have a right to know, and the families of the soldiers have a right to know if this mission has changed. Has it changed? Has it expanded? Are we just doing training, as the Prime Minister suggested, or are we in combat?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we are performing an extremely important role of training, advising, and assisting the peshmerga specifically. We are also providing intelligence and tactical aircraft support. We will be finalizing our installation of a medical facility in Iraq.

We are an important and well-respected contributor to the coalition. We are doing our job. We must ensure, however, that we do not jeopardize the operational security of our Canadian troops.

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ETHICS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his team are now under investigation by the federal lobbying commissioner for their cash for access fundraising. It is clear that his rules for open and accountable government were nothing more than a prop. Under his orders, ministers are repeatedly violating his own ethics rules.

The Prime Minister knows that this is wrong. Everybody knows this is wrong. It is damaging the integrity of his office. Why does he not just stop doing it?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal rules are some of the strongest in the country. In fact, in some provinces individuals can donate in the tens of thousands of dollars, and in others they do not have any limits. Some provinces accept donations from unions, trade associations, and corporations. That is not the case in the federal system.

Federal politics is subject to some of the strictest political financing legislation and regulations in the country, and we fully comply with the rules.

* * *

● (1420)

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seven months ago, in March, my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent personally handed the Prime Minister a letter from Lucie Laperle.

In that letter, Ms. Laperle outlined the problems she experienced in the Canadian Armed Forces, including discriminatory events. That is very serious.

Oral Questions

Does Ms. Laperle have to buy a \$1,500 ticket to a fundraising event to get a response?

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

In this country, we clearly recognize that we have made mistakes in the past, whether those mistakes were made by the government, the Department of National Defence, or society as a whole.

We have changed and evolved. We understand the importance of recognizing the equality and dignity of all those who serve their country as part of the armed forces. That is the new approach that we will continue to promote here in Canada.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned from the parliamentary budget officer that 50% fewer jobs were created over the past year compared to the previous five-year average.

The past five years include the worst economic crisis since the Second World War. It was the previous government that had to deal with that crisis, and yet we still created twice as many jobs. The Liberals are going to tell me everything they have done since they took office, but it simply is not working.

Can someone tell the House what they are going to do starting today? Their plan is not working.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity afforded by our colleague to remind the House that Canadians elected a government that has chosen to invest in the middle class and in the future of our economy to create jobs now and in the future, as part of an inclusive, sustainable economic development approach that benefits the middle class and leaves no one behind.

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[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today Belgium made it clear that it will not accept CETA if it includes investor-state rules. These rules give foreign companies privileged access to sue governments in exclusive courts over environmental protections, worker safety, or any other laws a company feels may threaten its profits, and yet these rules are still part of the draft agreement.

Europeans want this deal fixed. Canadians want this deal fixed. Will the minister commit to removing the investor-state provisions from this deal?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, frankly, I am astonished that the NDP cannot get behind a deal that today has the full support of all progressives across Europe.

Last week, the German vice-chancellor, a social democrat, said that “CETA is a good and modern agreement, providing us with a great opportunity to set fair and good rules for ongoing globalization.” Manuel Valls, the socialist prime minister of France, also backs CETA.

Are there any trade deals the NDP will support?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister still does not get that we are not prepared to accept just any agreement with Europe and that we want a good agreement.

The minister says that free trade with Europe is a done deal, but there is no compensation for our dairy producers and nothing to protect drug prices. Plus, the Belgians still oppose the possibility of a company taking legal action against a government in secret courts.

Will the minister finally pay attention to Canadians' concerns and fix this bad deal?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have negotiated a progressive accord. I am very surprised at the NDP's reaction.

All of the provinces, including Quebec, support this agreement. We worked very closely with the Government of Quebec, which expressed appreciation for our efforts in recent days. Quebecers have the right to know whether the NDP supports CETA or not.

Does the NDP support a progressive approach that will create thousands of jobs across the country?

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberals, we will not support agreements negotiated by the Conservatives.

The Prime Minister wrote to his ministers that their behaviour should bear the closest public scrutiny, even when it comes to the appearance of a conflict of interest. He made that clear in their mandate letters.

Today, the Ethics Commissioner opened the door to the possibility of adopting the Prime Minister's rules and including them in her own mandate. That is excellent news.

If he does not feel like enforcing his own rules, is the Prime Minister at least prepared to give the Ethics Commissioner the power to do so in his place?

● (1425)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, federal rules are among the strictest in the country.

In fact, in some provinces, personal donations can run into the tens of thousands of dollars. Other provinces do not set any limits. Some provinces also allow donations from unions, corporations, and business associations. The federal system does not allow such donations.

Every member and every party does fundraising and they all have to follow the same rules.

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if these cash for access fundraisers do not break the law, then clearly the law is broken. The Prime Minister is defending this cash for access scheme even though it clearly violates his own ethics rules.

Today, the Ethics Commissioner called these fundraisers unsavoury and said, "One wonders whether indeed people are getting unfair access."

Since his ministers are not abiding by his rules, and the Prime Minister refuses to enforce them, will he now allow the Ethics Commissioner to enforce these rules for him? Yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said time and time again, federal politics is subject to some of the strictest political financing legislation and regulations in the country. When the rules are followed, no conflicts of interest can exist, and we will continue to follow the rules.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government plans to hike Canada pension plan contributions.

Under the Liberal plan, workers will pay \$1,000 more a year and entrepreneurs will have to pay \$1,000 more a year per employee. That is not a good thing to do. Yesterday, CBC reported that, according to an internal Department of Finance briefing note, if the government goes forward with this measure, it will have a negative impact on jobs not just for two or three years, but for 20 years. We have been saying that for weeks, and now it has been confirmed by Finance Canada.

Does the Minister of Finance agree with the department—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his interesting question.

We said that enhancing of the Canada pension plan would have a positive long-term effect on the Canadian economy. When we held our budget consultations, Canadians were clear: they want an enhanced Canada pension plan to ensure that the old age security program remains sustainable so that people can live with dignity in retirement.

That is exactly what we are doing, and it is going to help this generation and future generations of Canadians across the country.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Minister of Finance does not listen to the Department of Finance.

All economic observers acknowledge that forecasts for Canada's economic growth have been downgraded. To turn things around, the

Liberal government is imposing its carbon tax, increasing Canadian pensions for all workers, and maintaining corporate tax rates at current levels.

Given the current situation, when will the government understand that it is not working in the interest of all Canadians?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent.

What Canadians understand, and what my colleagues opposite do not, is that the time to invest in the Canadian economy is when interest rates are low. That is exactly what we are doing.

We started by investing in the middle class by cutting taxes. Then, we made an historic investment in infrastructure of \$120 billion over 10 years.

We have an investment plan for innovation that is heralded not just in Canada, but around the world, by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Lethbridge.

* * *

[English]

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made a promise to Canada's young people. He said that he would create jobs and improve their economic future. Unfortunately, it would appear that the finance minister did not get the memo. He told Canada's youth that they will simply have to accept the fact that they will move from job to job to job. It is no wonder youth were heckling the Prime Minister and calling on the Liberals to honour their broken promises.

Will the Prime Minister direct his finance minister to keep his promise to build a better economic future for Canada's young people, or will he just continue to sit on the sidelines?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians recognize, certainly the stakeholders I meet with do, that there is an evolving job market out there, particularly for young Canadians. That is why we have made historic investments in skills training and education. These, in turn, will yield good-paying jobs. We have made investments like \$1.5 billion in student grants. We have provided almost \$170 million for a youth employment strategy and \$330 million for Canada summer jobs that created 80,000 summer jobs.

Canadians expect investments like that, and we are making them.

● (1430)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not realize that these retail jobs and fast food jobs were evolving and good paying, as the hon. member opposite says.

Oral Questions

The finance minister has written youth off completely, simply saying that they are going to bounce from retail jobs to fast food jobs, and somehow they are just going to have to make this work. That is just not going to cut it for this generation. They want to build their own businesses. They want hope for a vibrant future, but the problem is that young entrepreneurs are losing hope. They are losing hope of being successful, because they are being taxed to death. They are being punished by the government's ill decisions.

Is the Prime Minister deliberately promising—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the reason this government has invested \$800 million in innovation. That is why we are working on an innovation plan. That is the reason why members of Parliament have had many round tables. Over 1,400 ideas have come in for Canada's innovation plan, and that is the reason we are going to be building modern, new kinds of jobs so that young people have the opportunity to have great careers in clean tech, in digital numeracy, and we have jobs and prosperity for all Canadians for years to come.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a secret finance department analysis shows that the CPP tax hike will not only cause 40 years of economic damage but also that “raising CPP contribution rates for employers and employees will reduce workers' take-home pay and increase employers' wage bills.... Lower take-home pay could also reduce the number of hours workers are willing to work”.

Surprise. When we tax hiring and work, we get less hiring and work.

Why would the finance minister bring in a new tax that his department said would be a job killer?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were clear with Canadians that the CPP enhancement would have a net positive long-term impact on the economy. As we went around in the country, we heard that Canadians want to have a secure, strong, and stable retirement.

That is why the members should be happy that last June we were able to get an agreement with the provinces to enhance the CPP, something the Conservatives were never able to do. Enhancing the CPP is what Canadians are looking forward to, because Canadians want to retire in dignity.

By enhancing the CPP, we are going to create growth in this country. This is the right policy for Canadians. That is the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

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EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the PBO released its annual jobs assessment. It showed unemployment

down across the U.S., the G7, and the OECD but up in Canada, where we had a net loss of 6,000 full-time jobs, plus, average hours worked down, 40,000 mining and resource jobs gone, and 20,000 manufacturing jobs gone.

When will the Prime Minister accept the evidence that tax, borrow, and spend has failed.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know everyone is enthusiastic today and is looking forward to the answer, but we need to hear the answer from the hon. Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to give a good answer in response to my colleague's excellent question; I can imagine the member is anxious to hear all about just how serious our government is about wanting to invest in an economy that will grow the middle class. It will also be an economy for the future, which will put us on a sustainable and inclusive path, will leave no one behind, and will generate hope and enthusiasm among our young people, who want to build a better country.

* * *

● (1435)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating our motion to end discrimination against indigenous children.

The Liberals say they have applied Jordan's principle, but the tribunal clearly told the government that it had to implement the complete definition of the principle. What is more, the House, including the Liberals, voted in favour of the definition in 2007.

Will the minister stop paying lip service in the House and start implementing Jordan's principle in full?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcomed the tribunal's decision, and we have taken concrete measures in response to its orders. We invested \$630 million to close the funding gap, and we expanded the application of Jordan's principle. As of August of this year, services are being offered to 900 more children.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Nine hundred kids? That is it? Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House agrees that the first nations child welfare system is underfunded. The question is whether the government will comply with the legal ruling ordering it to take immediate action. After nine months, and two compliance orders later, the government's notion of “immediate” becomes clear. Wait for it: more consultations and an online survey.

Oral Questions

The government can consult all it wants. The question is whether the Prime Minister believes he is above the law of the land, while first nations children are scooted by the law.

It is a simple question. Will the Prime Minister support our motion to bring the Liberal government into compliance with the Human Rights Tribunal ruling that orders immediate action on the—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat that we welcomed the tribunal's ruling and have taken concrete steps to address its orders. We have committed \$635 million to address the funding gap, and we are overhauling the child welfare system.

Today a Manitoba chief said to me, “Unfortunately the debate today is about money instead of the total reform of the system”. The fact is that the status quo on first nations child welfare is unacceptable, and we are committed to real reforms that put children first.

* * *

ETHICS

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked a question about the malaria drug mefloquine and its maker Apotex. Later today our committee will hear from veterans who are suffering from the side effects of this drug.

Veterans were shocked to learn that the finance minister has been lobbied by this company and will be hosted by an Apotex executive at a Liberal fundraiser, an event these veterans cannot afford to attend.

How can our veterans trust the Liberals to do the right thing when their party is being financed by fundraisers organized by the chairman of Apotex?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the core of my mandate is the health and wellness of our veterans and their families.

I am of the understanding that our veterans are testifying at committee, and I would like to hear from them and feed that information into the work we are doing. We will continue to work with our health care professionals throughout our department, the 4,000 who are on standby, ready, willing, and able to assist. We will continue to work on health and wellness issues for our veterans, full stop.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just more dodging. The question was about ethics, not about veterans. The Liberals refuse to answer these very simple questions. Veterans and all Canadians demand answers.

Apotex is suing the federal government at the same time it is lobbying Liberal ministers, while fighting our veterans. Meanwhile, the chairman of Apotex is raising money for the Liberal Party.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he and his ministers are not following their own rules, and bring someone in who will finally enforce them?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said time and time again that the federal rules are some of the strongest in the entire country. In fact, in some provinces, individuals can donate in the tens of thousands of dollars, and in others, there are no limits. Some provinces accept donations from unions, trade associations, and corporations. That is not the case in the federal system.

We know that all members of Parliament in all parties fundraise and will continue to abide by the rules.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not believe the Liberals on the exclusive cash for access fundraisers. We know the Lobbying Commissioner has opened an investigation into the Liberals' behaviour, because, well, she does not believe them either.

I am not asking about election financing laws, and frankly, it is embarrassing for the Liberals to keep trying to hide behind them. Either the Prime Minister needs to start enforcing his own rules or he should stand up and admit that he broke his promise to Canadians.

• (1440)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that the federal rules are some of the strongest in the country. We know that all members of Parliament in all parties fundraise, and we all abide by the exact same rules.

We have committed to following the rules, and we will continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government says one thing and does the opposite. It calls itself feminist, but voted against a pregnancy support program. It calls itself pro-youth, but voted against helping students who take first aid courses. It talked about running modest deficits but has let the deficit get out of control. To top it off, it made ethics rules only to turn around and break them.

I do not know if that is how the Liberal government does politics in 2016, but it is time to walk the talk.

Will the Minister of Finance and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons keep spouting the same old lines, or will they give us a real answer?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is the answer. They asked a question, and I gave them an answer.

The truth is that federal rules are among the strictest rules in the country, and that is a fact.

Oral Questions

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government was elected on the promise of a renewed nation-to-nation relationship and environmental action.

Yet aboriginal communities and environmental groups are again forced to pursue legal action, this time against the government for approving the Petronas LNG project. The government gave a green light to Petronas, despite significant impacts to critical salmon habitat and a monumental increase in greenhouse gases.

Why is the government failing in its duty to protect first nations fisheries and to combat climate change?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this project underwent a three-year, rigorous scientific review that incorporated traditional knowledge and evaluated and mitigated the environmental impacts.

It was the first time we included indigenous peoples in the technical working group reviewing a project. It is also the first time we will have indigenous communities working with the federal government and the province to monitor the project.

Indigenous communities beside the project will have impact benefit agreements with the proponent—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for two weeks now, the Heiltsuk Nation has been living their worst nightmare as diesel washed up on their shores, wiping out critical fish habitat and putting their entire economy at risk.

The Heiltsuk deserve compensation from a government that did so little, so late, in their time of need. Instead of self-congratulatory “mission accomplished” from the fisheries minister, when is he going to actually compensate the families of Bella Bella who will lose their livelihoods this winter because of his department’s incompetence?

When will the Liberals finally follow through on their commitment to protect B.C.’s coast so that this nightmare never happens again?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are also concerned about the impact on the Heiltsuk Nation. I have spoken to Chief Marilyn Slett. I will be meeting her again twice in the next two weeks.

We are certainly recognizing the fact that we need to do better on marine security. We are looking at the issue of compensation.

We need to improve protection on all our three coasts. That is why the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and I have been working for months now, and we will have some things to say very shortly.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Hurricane Matthew had a devastating impact on Haiti,

which was still struggling to recover from the terrible earthquake of 2010. The international community is rallying, but enormous needs remain unmet and the risk of epidemics is huge. The UN has announced a plan to fight cholera.

Can the minister inform the House about what the government is doing to help the people of Haiti?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge Park for his question.

Since the beginning of the year, our government has provided over \$11 million in humanitarian aid for Haiti, including \$6 million to assist the victims of Hurricane Matthew. We also increased our contribution to UNICEF by \$8 million in order to provide drinking water and sanitation systems in regions affected by cholera.

We have also provided an additional \$200,000 to local NGOs that offer direct assistance to the people of Haiti. Lastly, we are awaiting the details of the UN plan in order to assess how we can best contribute to the fight against cholera.

* * *

● (1445)

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have put an end to providing technical briefings on all military deployment. They have put more troops in danger on the front lines against ISIS, removed their air combat support and failed to provide adequate medical care. In addition, the Prime Minister has not ruled out sending our troops into Syria.

In opposition, he said, “...if the Prime Minister wants Canada to join a war in Iraq, he first needs to make that case to Canadians. He can start by being open and transparent...”. Does the Prime Minister see his hypocrisy? When will he be transparent with Canadians?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after long debate in the House many months ago, the government received a mandate to pursue this mission. That mission is in fact being pursued. There has been no change in the mandate. There has been no change in the mission. There has been no change in the rules of engagement.

This mission is being pursued within the terms of the mandate, as provided by the House. Briefings will be given as and when we can secure the safety of our troops.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is mistaken. The mission has changed. We have proof and information from abroad. Our troops are on the frontline and fighting the enemy. That is a change in mission.

Oral Questions

Why is the government hiding the truth? Why is it not being transparent with us? It keeps playing the same old broken record saying that we are advising or helping the Kurds, but we know that is not true. They are doing more than that.

Can the government be transparent and tell Canadians the truth?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member inadvertently gave me an illustration of the problem we face, which is that he has “information from abroad”. We cannot, under any circumstances, react to information from abroad, which would potentially jeopardize the security of our troops.

I am sure the hon. member would not wish to pursue the issue of jeopardizing the security of our troops.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is about transparency and being open with Canadians.

The Prime Minister is currently campaigning on the backs of 600 Canadian troops to earn a UN Security Council seat, even though he shamefully said yesterday that he blamed soldiers for his lack of transparency.

This comes from a Prime Minister who said last year that the Liberal Party could not support any military mission when the arguments to support it had not been presented in an open and transparent manner.

Despite the Prime Minister's outrageous contradictions, will he tell Canadians exactly where, when and why he has blindly committed our troops to an undefined UN mission in Africa?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House for a long time and I do not recollect the Prime Minister saying at all that he had committed the troops to Africa, at any place or any time. The Minister of National Defence took two of Canada's foremost experts, Roméo Dallaire and Louise Arbour, on a five country mission.

No decision has been made and when that decision is made, we will then inform the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I ask my question, I want the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence to know that it is not our intention to jeopardize the safety of our troops. I just wanted to know whether the troops are in combat or not.

Speaking of secrets, out of nostalgia, the Liberals recommitted us to peacekeeping missions, but we are being kept in the dark about that commitment.

What mess are we going to end up in and for how long? Who are our partners? What are the rules of engagement? They talk about it abroad behind closed doors, but the government does not communicate any information to Canadians.

Will the minister finally be transparent about the mission in Africa?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is hearing is that the Minister of National Defence made a five-country trip through Africa. He took with him two of Canada's, if not the world's, foremost experts, General Dallaire and Justice Arbour, who are both experts in conflict resolution.

At this point, no decision has been made, and so the member's question, if it is at all legitimate, is entirely premature.

* * *

● (1450)

LABOUR

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister calls precarious work a fact of life and the Minister of Finance says that we should get used to it, Canadians have a different message for the government.

Yesterday, 200 people attended our forum on Parliament Hill on the rise of precarious work in the millennial generation. We heard stories of unstable work and the need for national leadership.

The Prime Minister likes to pass himself off as the minister of youth, but when young workers are facing a seismic shift, all he can do is shrug. When will the government admit that precarious work is an issue of critical importance, and when will it take real action for—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government certainly does recognize the challenges that are facing our workforce now, especially young Canadians.

The parliamentary budget officer, in his report, said that the changing job market was offering different types of positions for young Canadians. He recognizes that smart and necessary investments have to be made, and that is what this government is doing. We are hoping our investments will yield long-term, well-paid jobs for our young Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the UN is preparing to vote on a resolution to ban nuclear weapons. Over a hundred countries support this initiative, but not Canada.

In the past, the Liberals argued in favour of a ban on nuclear weapons, here in the House in 2010 and at their party convention earlier this year. When the Liberals were in opposition, they were in favour of nuclear disarmament.

Why are the Liberals now refusing to support initiatives to ban these devastating weapons?

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is a long-standing supporter of the nuclear test ban treaty, and we will continue to work toward a world free of nuclear weapons in the most effective way possible.

It is fairly important to note that no nuclear power is supporting the motion, but Canada is working toward a real workable and effective solution that will bring all nuclear powers together. We remain committed to a world free of nuclear weapons in the most effective way possible.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is international religious freedom day. Sadly, many people around the world do not enjoy religious freedom, and a large number have had their freedoms limited by their own government. Being a refugee because of one's faith is a reality that all too many people around the world face.

Today, will the government commit to expediting the refugee applications of people who are being persecuted because of their faith, such as Christians in northern Iraq?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that this government brought in 25,000 Syrian refugees over the space of four months. This has become praised around the world.

In addition to that, as the member knows, all parties supported the motion recently to welcome Yazidis to Canada. Our government is working on that plan right now.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, China has just passed a new law aimed at shutting down Christian house churches where over 70 million Chinese people worship. In the same week, Muslim parents in the PRC were told that they would be reported to police if they encouraged their children to participate in religious activities.

I ask the minister to take this opportunity right now to specifically condemn these outrageous abuses of human rights. Will the government speak out clearly and specifically against the latest crackdown on religious liberty in China?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion. We have a comprehensive mandate that includes all human rights, including, as I know it is so important to the member opposite, freedom of religion. Moreover, we have all 135 ambassadors championing this comprehensive vision. It is entrenched in their mandate. It is central to their work.

This allows Canada to be a more effective defender of universal human rights, which are universal, indivisible, and interdependent,

and is properly reflected in the office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion.

• (1455)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting. While people around the world continue to suffer for their faith, there is complete silence from the Liberal's office of everything, this office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion.

Despite having 36 full-time employees and a budget four times that of the former Office of Religious Freedom, we have heard nothing from the minister on how this office is actually helping people on the ground.

On this international religious freedom day, we have historic levels of religious persecution around the world. Why are the Liberals finding it so difficult to take these issues seriously?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to update the House on the recent trip of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico.

We took a human rights activist from Canada on that trip. Eighty to ninety per cent of his time was focused on human rights, together with that activist. Then he challenged his counterparts in those governments on their records. This person who went with him said that this had been a sea change in terms of how the Canadian government addressed human rights. Not a single meeting was cancelled. In fact, more were held.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 6, the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that Canada has accepted the invitation to be the guest of honour host country for the 2020 Frankfurt Book Fair.

Could the minister explain why the 2020 Frankfurt Book Fair is a priority for the government?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Frankfurt Book Fair is the world's most important marketplace for the book publishing industry. Being the guest of honour is a fantastic opportunity to enable and support Canada's world-class authors, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs to maximize their full export potential, increase their competitive position on the international stage, and contribute to Canada's overall economic and social prosperity.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Saturday, the people of Lac-Mégantic will celebrate the reopening of Frontenac Street, which was destroyed on July 6, 2013. For residents, this is an important part of the healing process.

However, the celebration will be short-lived if nothing is done because the rail bypass will not be complete for another seven years. The Minister of Transport can do something about these unacceptable delays.

Will the Minister of Transport give new hope to the residents of Lac-Mégantic by announcing today that they will have a rail bypass?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said many times, we are keeping a close eye on the work that is being done to complete the study on the Lac-Mégantic rail bypass.

We paid for half that study, which is being managed by the City of Lac-Mégantic. If the process can be accelerated, so much the better, but the work still needs to be done. We look forward to learning the results of the study.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Minister of Canadian Heritage appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

However, all her answers were evasive. She could not tell us whether the RCMP had set up a system to monitor bilingual services on the Hill, nor could she name one single good recommendation of the unanimous report on the Translation Bureau. I will give her one more chance.

Can the minister tell us, yes or no, whether she believes in the principle of by and for? In other words, does she believe that services provided in the official languages must be offered by and for official language minority communities?

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

Our interpretations of what happened at the committee are quite different. I believe that committee members, with the exception of my colleague, were very satisfied with the progress that our government has made in various areas with respect to official languages.

Therefore, I will mention a few of the subjects I spoke about this morning, in particular the return of French-language education at Royal Military College Saint-Jean, which I worked on with my colleague, the Minister of Defence. I also raised the issue of the appointment of bilingual judges, on which I worked with my colleague, the Minister of Justice. Furthermore, we talked about immigration—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the port of Sydney has long been an essential asset to the economy of Cape Breton Island. Studies have shown that the construction of a second marine berth in the harbour would greatly enhance port traffic, especially in the lucrative cruise ship sector.

Oral Questions

I previously made the Minister of Infrastructure aware of this important project in the House. I am hoping he can provide an update on whether or not the port of Sydney is eligible for funding.

• (1500)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sydney—Victoria for his ongoing advocacy on this project.

Infrastructure Canada has received an application for this project, and my department is working with the port of Sydney and the Province of Nova Scotia to review the business case.

We know making such investments in regions like Cape Breton generates economic growth, creates jobs, and leaves a lasting legacy for Canadians.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture's chief of staff has been a walking, talking conflict of interest since he hired her. As we speak, a clerk is reviewing private prosecution alleging that she committed perjury.

Canadian farmers need to know that when the minister makes a decision it is good for all farmers, not just Mary Jean McFall of Burnbrae Farms.

All Canadians can see the problem with Liberal ethics. Will the minister do the right thing: replace his chief of staff until her legal issues are resolved?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's chief of staff is involved in her community at every level. She is also an accomplished lawyer and businesswoman, and she was even honoured with her community's citizen of the year award. Her community involvement credentials are outstanding. The minister's chief of staff is also deeply committed to Canadian agriculture and public service. She has complied with all of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's requirements and followed all of the guidelines—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, I asked the Prime Minister whether he intended to sink more of Quebecers' money into Muskrat Falls. His minister replied that if the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador wants to have that loan guarantee extended, the Government of Canada will look at it very seriously. The truth is that Ottawa and Newfoundland and Labrador have been negotiating since May 10.

Why did the minister lead the House to believe that there had been no talks? Was it because the decision has been made and he is afraid of how the Government of Quebec will react?

Business of Supply

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this project will provide a source of clean, reliable energy to meet the needs of the Atlantic provinces. We will continue to follow up on this, and we are working closely with the province and the proponents. We are currently discussing the matter with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. No decision has yet been made.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know how the Government of Quebec is going to react. Any additional federal assistance for the Muskrat Falls project will create a situation of unfair competition for Hydro-Québec. Need I remind the House that Hydro-Québec developed without Ottawa's help? Newfoundland and Labrador want to compete in foreign markets, and Quebeckers are supposed to pay for that? That is out of the question.

Will the minister make a solemn commitment to the House that he will not increase the loan guarantee for Newfoundland and Labrador, as the Government of Quebec has asked?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that the Government of Canada is working with the Government of Quebec to invest in the Quebec economy through its regional agencies.

As we have said, we have already invested \$380 million in post-secondary institutions in Quebec. Through Canada Economic Development, we just announced an investment of nearly \$300 million in the province of Quebec. We are there, working closely with Quebec, and we will always help Quebec stay on track economically.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Jeh Johnson, United States Secretary of Homeland Security.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Brian Gallant, Premier of New Brunswick.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: Now I believe the hon. opposition House leader has the usual Thursday question.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do have the Thursday question, and I think we have some indication that next week there may be a couple of things a little bit out of the ordinary, so I am looking forward to hearing what the government has planned. I am hoping that maybe, with the fiscal update, we may hear that there might be a reversal on the increased taxation and spending, but I am not sure if that will happen.

I wonder if the hon. House leader will let us know what is going to be happening next week.

[Translation]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

This afternoon we will continue to debate the supply day motion. Tomorrow we will commence debate on Bill C-29, the second budget implementation act, and we will continue studying that bill next week.

[English]

On Tuesday afternoon, the Minister of Finance will present the fall economic statement. Following the speech, we will have debate for the remainder of the afternoon.

On Wednesday, immediately after question period, the House will welcome the Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic athletes to the chamber. I think I can speak for all members when I say this will be a very exciting day.

Last, next Thursday shall be an allotted day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, individuals who will take the time to understand the constituency I represent would quickly understand why this is such an important issue for me, my constituents, and all Canadians. It is critically important that we put the children first.

I am proud to be a part of a government that is led by a Prime Minister who has made a solemn commitment to indigenous people.

There are a number of areas of concern. Let there be no doubt about that. One of my primary concerns over a number of years is the child welfare system. Discrimination does take place, and it is so critically important that we take more action.

For years I sat on the opposition benches and looked to Steven Harper, the former prime minister, and the Conservative government to act on a file that is important not only to my constituents but to all Canadians. For years I sat and watched the government do nothing. Finally that real change that took place on October 19th set the stage for some significant things to take place.

Within two months the Prime Minister indicated that we were going to have a public inquiry into the more than 1,200 missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. That was significant for me because when I was in opposition I presented petitions, asked questions, and did many other things to try to raise the profile of the issue. Through an inquiry we are able to get a better sense of the circumstances surrounding what has taken place.

Business of Supply

I have had the opportunity to meet with young people who share not only my concern but the concern no doubt of many individuals in the chamber, and that is the plight of indigenous children. We should all be concerned.

Let us not underestimate the importance of the many different stakeholders out there, and in particular, the very strong and capable leadership of our indigenous people themselves. Far too often in the past, government has overlooked that leadership. Our Prime Minister has given strong indications that, in dealing with issues of this nature, it is important that we recognize the strong leadership that is there today within our indigenous communities and how important it is that we allow that leadership to not only grow but to be prevalent and strong as we go into the discussions in the months ahead.

I was proud of the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, who today recognized that the biggest flaw within today's opposition motion is that it is, for all intents and purposes, somewhat piecemeal. What is necessary is a complete overhaul. We need genuine reform. What has been taking place over the last decade has not worked. It has been an absolute and total failure. If we were to canvas the many different stakeholders who are informed about this important issue, I believe they would tell us that they recognize that the system is broken and that we need to fix it. We cannot fix the system by throwing millions of dollars at it. We need to ensure that the system that we have in place will make the desired difference that we want and then make sure that the necessary resources are available in order for that system to work. This is something that the minister and our government have clearly demonstrated. Since the Prime Minister took office, he has been clear on the principles of the new relationship that is being established and built upon within first nations communities.

What are we asking for? We are asking for the needs of first nations children to be put first.

• (1510)

Canada is in fact fully committed to a complete overhaul of the child and family services system on reserve, developed with and for first nations people.

I know that the province of Manitoba has the highest per capita rate of foster care. We are talking of well over 10,000 children. That is with a population base of 1.25 million people. It is a crisis. The child advocate office, back in 2010, indicated that Manitoba was in a child care crisis. That was said by the independent child advocacy office in the province.

We need to recognize that it is not just Ottawa that has to fix the problem. We have to recognize there are other stakeholders out there and that if we fail to work with those stakeholders, if we do not work with the strong indigenous leadership today, the children will not be best served.

We welcomed and accepted and are complying with the tribunal's rules. Achieving this reform requires partnerships, as I said, with first nations, with child welfare agencies, as well as with the provinces and territories. We are going to be completely engaged with our partners to develop options for a full-scale reform. Earlier today, the minister announced that Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux will be her special representative responsible for leading the national engage-

ment process and providing advice on the reform of the on-reserve first nations child and family services program. This government is investing hundreds of millions of dollars directly into it.

Indirectly, I could talk about the Canada child benefit program. This is a government that is committed to making a difference, and I believe that over the coming weeks and months and in the years ahead we are going to see a very much reformed system that will be far more effective than the previous Harper government's one was.

• (1515)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our colleague said that the former government did nothing for first nations. I know that this gentleman was elected in 2010, but can he recognize that here in the House of Commons on June 11, 2008, the former prime minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, officially apologized to first nations on behalf of all Canadians. It was the first and only time in Canadian history that an elected prime minister in the House of Commons, or anywhere else, recognized the responsibility of Canadians to first nations.

Can the member also recognize that on the same day the former prime minister established the crown inquiry into residential schools. Can he recognize that?

Can the member also recognize that the only time in Canadian history that the grand chief of the first nations came here to address the House of Commons was under the strong and proud leadership of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. Can he recognize that?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to recognize that the former prime minister did as the member said. I was in fact inside the Manitoba legislature and I believe my colleague and friend was in the Quebec legislature at the time. We can recall it.

It even had many spin-offs. There were huge expectations that followed that apology. This is where individuals from every region of our country would argue that was the problem. The apology was wonderful and greatly appreciated and long overdue, but it was the follow-through that was the biggest and most significant problem.

Many of the plights that we have today are there because of government inaction. We needed strong national leadership years ago, and more than just an apology. That is in fact what was lacking. Because of that lack of desire to move forward on such an important file, today we have more and more children living in poverty, situations that require us to take as much action as necessary to provide them with hope and opportunity. Things can get better, and they—

The Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Business of Supply

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member across often refers to his time in the Manitoba legislature. He may know, through even a personal connection he might have, that in Manitoba there was a unanimous decision earlier this week to condemn the federal government for its treatment of aboriginal children in child and family services. This was a motion directed at the federal government. In a province like ours, we have an acute understanding of the way in which the federal government has neglected child and family services, particularly on reserve, and how this has led to all sorts of issues and challenges that indigenous people face in our province.

Will the member and his government come to realize that supporting this motion and showing leadership in addressing the chronic underfunding of child welfare is the way forward? Let us cut the rhetoric. Let us listen to provinces like Manitoba that are saying that the federal government has a responsibility to finally take action.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member says that we should cut the rhetoric.

I read the resolution and I can tell the member that the Liberal Party's position was that the word "condemn" was not necessary, but it recognizes the importance of that particular issue. As much as Liberals opposed what the NDP were proposing provincially in that resolution, they felt it was in the best interests of the child to vote in favour of it. I am very proud of what my daughter did, but they did make that one exception.

Let me remind the member that, like me, there is a family connection in the Manitoba legislature. I sat in the legislature when the member's father sat around the cabinet table. Poverty got worse under 10-plus years of NDP administration, worse than it ever was. The poverty per capita in the province of Manitoba was the worst of all the provinces, and that was under the leadership of New Democrat governments in which her own father participated. That poverty was dominated, in a very big way, by indigenous people.

We saw a provincial New Democrat government that did not do anything to really lift children out of poverty or to deal with the issues of child and family services. It was an absolute disaster on that issue. Again, Manitoba was the worst.

We have the highest number of children in child and family custody, and the provincial New Democratic Party has to take some responsibility for that.

• (1520)

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have this opportunity to add my voice to the debate, and I am pleased to reiterate our government's commitment to ensuring that all first nations children have access to the services they need.

This issue is very important to me and concerns me deeply, because my riding of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia is home to two beautiful Mi'kmaq communities, Gesgapegiag and Listuguj. As a father of four young boys, I am very much aware of the importance of services for children. Welfare and support are two essential conditions to ensuring that our young people have the tools they need to become independent.

Earlier this year, our government announced a new approach regarding Jordan's principle, supported by new investments, and this is clear evidence of our commitment to this objective.

Of course, people living in first nations communities should not be penalized. We want all Canadian children to be healthy and safe. If we truly want to achieve reconciliation, we must work together to build relationships based on rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. As the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, that is what I am focusing on with the first nations communities in my riding.

As many of my colleagues have already said today, our government recognizes that we must review the first nations child and family services program. The Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs is committed to doing so in full partnership with first nations.

That does not mean that we are going to just sit around waiting for this critical work to produce the desired results. The Government of Canada is intervening in many different ways to improve child and family services across the country.

First, our government invested new money in prevention programs for first nations child and family services; these are programs that support children and families and, in doing so, strengthen our communities.

I would remind my hon. colleagues that budget 2016 allocated nearly \$635 million over five years to this program. These investments will enhance preventive services for children and families.

Thanks to the new funding allocated in the 2016 budget, we can now do more. From now on, first nations children and families living on reserve will have improved access to prevention services and community programs, such as parenting workshops and nutrition courses. There will be support for rapid response, with family visits and case conferences. We will offer more support for kinship or family placements so that children who have to be removed from their homes will be sent to live with relatives or people who are emotionally close to them.

With funding for targeted prevention, front-line service providers from social service agencies can work to keep families together rather than being forced to resort to more intrusive and costly care options.

What is more, on May 10, 2016, our government submitted a brief to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on the implementation of the Jordan principle. Our government understands that the Jordan principle applies to all first nations children. We are committed to working in partnership with first nations and the provinces and territories to ensure that first nations children get the care and support they need.

Business of Supply

Our government tailored its response to first nations children with a disability or a critical condition living on reserve, and also children who ordinarily live on reserve, because they are the most likely to face gaps in services or to be caught up in disputes about which jurisdiction is responsible for providing the services.

We backed our words with action and kept our promise by committing up to \$382 million over three years in additional funding. I will repeat it because it is important: these \$382 million in additional funds are spread over three years. This money will help ensure that children receive the health care and services they need when they need it.

A model for the coordination of enhanced care services is being implemented to help first nations children and their families navigate all the federal, provincial, and territorial health and social service systems. We want to help children and families in order to ensure that no one falls through the cracks.

• (1525)

The money, some of which will flow through the fund to resolve access to service issues, will also give first nations children access to the necessary resources and ensure that their needs are evaluated and met faster. This new money is already changing things.

Thanks to this new approach, we can confirm that more than 870 additional children will be covered for services and support under the Government of Canada's expanded definition of Jordan's principle.

That being said, we know we still have much more to do, and we will stay the course. We are determined to work with our partners to identify real needs and unique circumstances in communities across the country. We will hear directly from young people and families and use their ideas and perspectives to inform the development of a new system for first nations child and family services.

I myself am dialoguing with the chiefs and councils of our two communities, Gesgapegiag and Listuguj. We will keep those lines of communication open and continue to work with our partners to develop a longer-term approach to implementing Jordan's principle. Together, we will build better systems for tomorrow by learning from the experiences of young people and their families.

With that in mind, it is crucial that we work with first nations leaders and their communities, our provincial and territorial partners, and key organizations.

The Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs is working with our partners at the national and regional levels to develop options for reform and ways of rethinking the child protection system together in order to come up with an approach that is truly child-focused. A comprehensive engagement process is planned for child and family services. On top of additional funding, child services on reserve must be systematically overhauled.

That is why today we announced the appointment of Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux as the minister's special representative responsible for leading a national engagement process and providing advice on the reform of the on-reserve first nations child and family services program. This is a concrete step in our commitment to engage with partners to develop options for full-scale reform.

In order to find good, long-term solutions that will produce lasting results, we want to and must listen to young people, specific service-provider organizations, first nations leaders, and the provinces and territories, including Yukon.

By working together we can determine the needs of first nations children and families and those of the services agencies that support them. We can also identify the best way to meet those needs.

As this debate has shown, we are determined to come up with a system focused on children, families, and community well being, one that produces the best possible results for children. That is the key to reconciliation and a new nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples. We must work together on finding long-term solutions, not only to child protection issues, but also to social and economic ones. Together, we will chart the way forward by building on the strengths of first nations communities.

I encourage all members of the House and representatives of all parties to work on ensuring that real progress can be made on this important issue.

• (1530)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, who is a new member here.

He must be a bit confused because he said that we should work together, but that is precisely what we are doing here. One of the biggest problems is the lack of funding and the fact that the federal government is making no effort to comply with the law.

[*English*]

What I find incomprehensible from my Liberal colleagues across the way is that in response to the motion today, which simply calls on the government to respect the law, there is division in this place over its importance, despite the fact the Liberal government has said it would be different from the previous Conservative government, particularly when it came to first nations children. Moreover, the decisive action taken by the minister today was simply to appoint a special envoy. I am sure that first nation families are celebrating that from coast to coast to coast. My goodness, the Liberals have appointed a special envoy, when they have an opportunity here to confirm that they wish to respect the law that has shown the Government of Canada to be discriminating against first nation children.

My question is simple. What part of the law does the member not understand, what part of respecting first nations children does he not understand, and why did the special envoy tell the CBC today that the problem is not money, which she said the NDP wants to spread around like confetti? How insulting is that to first nation communities?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I think that my NDP colleague will be able to see how much of an effort our government is making to keep its commitment to work with first nations to close the health gap.

If my colleague wants numbers, I can give him some. In the 2016 budget, \$634 million was allocated over five years for child and family services. If he wants more numbers, I can give him more. We invested \$382 million over three years to fund this new approach. The money is there and so is the will. We have a minister who is passionate and committed. We have a government that is prepared to work and that continues to work to ensure that families and children have access to health care in their communities.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of us in the House recognize the need for a transformational reform of the child welfare system. What we have here is a motion that is looking to fill a gap via Jordan's principle, which is incredibly important.

My question for my colleague is this. He talked about some money, which quite frankly is back-loaded to past the next election. Can he guarantee that there is enough funding available now for all first nation and indigenous children to have the same services and programs available to them as to children off reserve?

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. We work together on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs and, once again, she does excellent work.

As I was saying earlier, we made a financial commitment of \$634 million in budget 2016. That is real money that is there to close the health care gap for families and children. Is it enough? Obviously not. We need to continue to work with first nations communities to clearly identify real needs beyond those that are already being addressed.

As mentioned earlier, the minister announced that Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux has been appointed to act as a special representative to lead a national consultation process and make practical recommendations.

However, we did not wait for the recommendations, and we have already committed to investing additional funds. We have allocated \$71 million for this year and an additional \$382 million over the next three years to help our children and our families. We are very proud of this commitment and we will continue our work because we want to ensure that first nations make progress and because children's health is our priority.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

I am searching for the right words. I typically say that it is an honour or pleasure to rise to speak. In my few years here in Parliament, I along with others have stood repeatedly in this place

demanding, pleading, insisting on change for first nations children as government after government has found another reason to fail the most vulnerable in our society.

For folks watching, this is a so-called opposition day in which the opposition puts forward a motion on something that we see as a priority. There are many things that we, as a New Democrat caucus, want to put forward. There is oil and diesel fuel spilling over the coast of British Columbia. Where is the Liberal protection plan for our coasts? There is a climate change crisis facing the world, and we have big Liberal promises, yet no plan. There is poverty and inequality, and our economy is performing very weakly. We are continuing to shed manufacturing jobs. These are all important priorities for Canadians.

Yet when we hold up this particular case, when we look at the Human Rights Tribunal decision of earlier this year, is there anything more stark? Is there anything more defining as a moral imperative for a government than when the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal declares definitively that the federal government is prejudiced and running a discriminatory program, a racialized program against the interests of a particular group? In this case, that group is first nations children.

I am trying to remember if this has ever happened to another such distinct group in Canada. Let us imagine if it were another ethnic group in Canada, and the Human Rights Tribunal came forward and said that the federal government was consistently enacting policy that was discriminatory, that was racist towards that group of Canadians. Would it take just one report?

We have had dozens of inquiries, dozens of investigations, and dozens of Human Rights Tribunal reports on the federal government's discriminatory, race-based actions against the interests of first nations children and families.

We have a new government that is now just a year old. We could say that for the first year there were lots of priorities and things to figure out as a government. How does it deal with those different priorities? I just heard the Liberals say that this is a crisis. It is a crisis for the Liberal government. It is a crisis for Canadians.

Let us compare the rate of activity. When the government had to make a decision on a mega dam project in northeastern British Columbia that went against first nations' interest, did it hire an envoy to go out and consult, to understand the different interests and values? No. It just fired up the bulldozer, and 24 hours later the government approved the most environmentally damaging project in Canadian history. There was no special envoy. There was no consultation tour.

Business of Supply

When the government went forward to approve a liquefied natural gas plant on the north coast in my riding, which today is subject to a lawsuit in court and is against first nations' rights and title, did the Liberals say they needed to make sure that everyone was on side and that we understood the science? No. The government said we should fire it up and get it done, too.

After months and months, and years, and decades of knowing there is a funding shortfall for first nations kids—which causes real harm and in some cases death to first nations kids—and after the apology on the floor of the House of Commons that all parties agreed to, and after many betrayals, it has come down to this. I use that word very importantly and very specifically, because a betrayal is when a promise has been made and hope has been offered, and then the opposite comes forward. When first nations leaders talk about the betrayal by the federal government, they mean it. It is based on something substantive, important, and real.

After all of that, when it comes to dealing with this crisis, the Liberal response is to hire an envoy who just a few minutes ago said that the NDP's idea and Cindy Blackstock's solution to this is to throw money around like “confetti”. It was the Human Rights Tribunal and Cindy Blackstock, who is renowned throughout the country for fighting for the welfare of first nations children, that told us definitively that the shortfall for first nations kids is \$155 million.

Instead, what is the government's response? It congratulates itself and says that it is doing more than could even be expected. Who are Canadians going to believe? Are Canadians going to believe Cindy Blackstock or this Prime Minister, who got a tattoo on his arm to signify how important relations with first nations are? By the way he technically stole that from the Haida, who are not too pleased about it right now.

• (1535)

No, it is true. To help my Liberal friends out, the Prime Minister of the country had a tattoo put on his arm, which he got off the Internet. It is nice, except that in the Haida tradition, that is theft because he took a sacred Haida design and put it on his body. The Haida have said there is an honour in the fact that the Prime Minister, a high-profile and significant person, has chosen to have Haida ink on his body. However, the Haida interpreted that as meaning a sacred connection, a very important connection.

I have had the privilege for years of spending time with that incredible first nation. The Haida are out today, and the artist who rendered that beautiful piece, saying they feel betrayed by the Prime Minister and no longer feel that him walking, day to day, as he does, around this place and around the world, wearing that significant piece of Haida art is no longer an honouring of the Haida people. We have to give pause on this.

There are day-to-day moments that happen in politics. There are things that come and go in Tweets and hassles, yet there is something deeper and more sacred that we are talking about here today. I have spoken with the various first nations agencies in my riding, the Gitksan, the Wet'suwet'en, the Carrier Sekani, who despite the lack of resources are doing incredible work with first nations families. Despite long odds, despite almost impossible situations, they are finding ways to connect their young people to culture.

I was in the far north of my riding along the Yukon border and the first nations there, the Taku River Tlingit, the Tahltan, and others, despite the racist policies of federal and provincial governments, have found ways to stop their children being taken into care by outside agencies, to meet the challenges of dependency, the theft of land, and the poverty that comes with that, to restore tradition, culture, and language, and a sense of self, despite all of these things.

Then we stand in the House of Commons today and hear the Liberals say they are different and they pull a muscle patting themselves on the back for the appointment of a special envoy, saying more consultation is the trick after so many years of betrayal, so many years of conclusive reports, after the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal made a decision. That is what the motion from the NDP calls for, to simply respect the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and to respect Jordan's principle, which the House passed almost a decade ago.

We ask for that to actually come into force, to be beyond just a motion in the House, that in Canada's Parliament we are going to do more than mouth the words about respect for first nations, more than mouth the words about crises in first nations communities and the crises that children are facing, which are real and horrifying. Rather than just mouth those words, New Democrats thought a good idea would be to tell the truth, shame the devil, and actually put those words into action.

What we hear from the Liberals today is that they cannot vote for this. They cannot implement things that they voted for in the past, and they ask why they would want to do that. They say that first nations should simply trust them because they are Liberals and not Stephen Harper. That is not good enough, my friends. Speeches are not good enough from the government. Photos are not good enough. Showing up at ceremonies is not good enough. A tattoo is not good enough. What is good enough is actually doing what the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has ordered the government to do in an unprecedented declaration in January of 2016.

I do not understand, for the life of me, how the Liberals can tell first nations leaders, first nations families, and first nations kids that they care, and yet stand in the House on a day like today, when we have an opportunity to bring into action, to make real that promise, to make real that hope, and say this is good enough and a special envoy should satisfy. I do not know what planet the Liberals are occupying right now.

Business of Supply

If they wish to visit with me or on their own, and this is a sincere offer, I will facilitate it and make it happen in my riding in northern British Columbia. If they want to meet the families struggling with these issues, if they want to meet the front-line workers who are, day to day, finding solutions and making a better world possible with limited and almost no funds in some cases, then they are welcome. We humbly offer up the many good examples happening in northern British Columbia, despite the racist policies, despite the discrimination, and despite the continual lack of funding.

● (1540)

There should be no more cynical, “We’re funding it and we’re going to fund it in the fifth year of our government.” First nations became wise to this a long time ago. The Liberals promised to do things differently. However, when we look at their funding promises the majority of the funding lands after the next election. Is that the best they have?

First nations deserve more. First nations will get more. Let us pass the motion. Let us do the right thing.

● (1545)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member’s comments. I first want to say that we have accepted the rulings of the tribunal and we have started implementing those rulings. We have accepted the definition of Jordan’s principle, and we certainly did not need a motion from the NDP to start doing what was urgent and necessary.

The problem I have with what the New Democrats are pushing today in the House of Commons is that they do not believe that a renewed relationship with the indigenous people of this country should be shaped by indigenous people. They believe that the government should have a top-down approach, and that they have the best ideas for indigenous Canada. It is that kind of thinking that has gotten us to where we are today.

Why does the member not agree with the tribunal ruling that the Government of Canada should fund children and first nations based on need and not based on a number that the NDP pulls out of the air?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I have two words for my friend: Muskrat Falls. How is that for a top-down government handling of an issue?

How is it that the government is now saying that it agrees with everything in the motion, but it will not vote for it. Where does the member think these ideas came from? They came from first nations people who had to take the previous federal government to court to get a resolution to this at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. This came from the Assembly of First Nations. What first nations is she talking about? If she wants to work with first nations, then she should vote for the motion. Where did this idea come from? It came from first nations. Who would this help? It would help first nations.

What part of this sentence from the Prime Minister’s own mandate letter to all cabinet ministers does the minister’s assistant not understand, “No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples”?

The member should walk the talk and vote for the motion.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although I was not here, I know that in 2007 everyone in the House committed to Jordan’s principle. What we have seen over the years is that there have been changes but we are not there yet.

I wonder if my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley could share where we still need to go to ensure that Jordan’s principle is the way we all intended it to be back in 2007?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it is clear we are not.

The fundamental thing for people to understand, and many of our ridings in British Columbia can show this descriptively, is that there can be a first nations child attending a school on reserve and another first nations child attending a school not on reserve, and there is a 30% to 40% funding difference between the experience of those two children because Ottawa controls the purse strings on the funding going to the kid who happens to be going to a school on reserve. In some places, that is an across-the-street situation. However, in rural and remote first nation communities, there is no across the street; there is only the first nation’s school.

We say, and the Human Rights Tribunal has said, that these are racist and discriminatory policies, end of sentence. If this was against African Canadians, Jewish Canadians, or any other identified group of Canadians, we would all be up in arms asking how this could be possible. However, it is first nations kids, and that is the way it has been for 150 years of Liberal and Conservative governments. The Liberal government is looking to blame somebody, and saying that it is somehow different. If the government wants to make it different, then it should be different. If it wants to be different, then it should not back-load the funding in such a cynical way, which has been done so many times, because first nations have become wise to the oldest trick in the book.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his important speech.

This morning when I talked to Deb Foxcroft, the president of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council about the motion, she issued a plea. She said that their children, youth, and families have been waiting a long, long time to get much needed supports and services to ensure their safety, well-being, and most importantly, connection to their culture, families, extended families, and communities, as well as the prevention services to ensure they do not have to come into care in the first place. She asked us to open our hearts and minds today and show that we truly care for all of our children in this place we call Canada. We all have a responsibility to our children. Let us not have them wait one more day, one more night, one more month, one more year.

Deb Foxcroft urged me to call on all MPs and ministers in the House to support the motion and release this critical funding for the delivery of child welfare.

Business of Supply

Would the member talk about this call to action and why we should support the motion to end the discrimination of first nations children?

• (1550)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, just so all Canadians understand, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has now had to issue two compliance orders after its ruling. It made the ruling and the federal government, by the way, said that it accepted the ruling but then did nothing about it. The tribunal had to issue a compliance order, saying the government said it would do it but it did not do it. That was the first one. The Canadian government said it would get right on that. The tribunal had to issue a second compliance order, all the while the Liberal government was telling first nations, “We got your back”. It is obviously not true.

The Liberals need some urging. I want them to succeed on this. I want the Liberals to follow through on this important promise. I want them to have the courage of their convictions to show up with the commitment in real terms, in real dollars, not another special envoy. The time is gone. Enough with the excuses, enough with the special consultations, just get the job done.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, I wish I could say it is a pleasure to be rising in the House today, but frankly speaking, it is not.

We are speaking today to the motion brought forward by my courageous friend and colleague from Timmins—James Bay, who has done so much for first nations in his riding and in Canada. It was seconded by the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

It is 2016, and here we are still talking about this issue. The 149-year relationship between Canada's federal government and first nations is filled with renege commitments, unfilled obligations, and broken promises.

We know that first nations children on reserve get less funding for child welfare services than other children, despite the fact that they have higher needs, which results in more of them being placed in state care today than at the height of the residential schools era. We know that this hardship is compounded by inequalities in other federally funded services, such as child and maternal health, early childhood programs, education, health, water, and sanitation. We know this leaves first nations children at higher risk for health and education problems, such as suicide and dropping out.

Let us talk about a solemn promise. Shortly after the October 19, 2015, election the Prime Minister promised to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. Child welfare equity is the number one call to action, and number three is full implementation of Jordan's principle to ensure first nations children can access government services on the same terms as other children. These are among the easiest of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. They are backed by solid solutions from the Auditor General and joint first nations and government reports going back two decades.

In January 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the federal government's inequitable provision of child welfare

services and a failure to properly implement Jordan's principle were racially discriminatory against 163,000 first nations children. I salute the hard work of people like Cindy Blackstock and the Assembly of First Nations, who have worked for almost a decade on this file. A historic ruling was handed down this January, and the government must respect it in this House.

The tribunal found that there was sufficient evidence to establish a case of discrimination, that first nations children and families living on reserve are denied equal child and family services, and that there was a narrow definition and very inadequate implementation of Jordan's principle, resulting in service gaps, delays, and denials for first nations children. The Liberals did not appeal this decision, and thus they have accepted the tribunal's ruling.

The problem is that the government has not met its obligations to these children as laid out by that tribunal. There have been now two compliance orders from the court because the government refuses to meet its legal and moral obligations to first nations children. I do not care what the government's plans are. It has been found in contempt of the tribunal's ruling and that is what matters, the rule of law.

This is not some kind of vindictive attack on the government, and I do know that Liberal members of Parliament feel just as passionately about this issue as I do, but it is time to bring the gap between what was promised and actions together. That is what we are talking about. Action must be taken and an immediate injection to close the funding shortfall in child welfare services must be found. It also, I acknowledge, must go hand in hand with the long-term reform of the system that caused this mess.

I was very honoured to work with the former member of Parliament, Jean Crowder, when she brought in Jordan's principle in 2007, and I want to bring it to the attention of this House that on December 12, 2007, this House of Commons passed that motion with 262 yeas and zero nays. It was absolutely unanimous. It was a proud day for this country. I truly thought that after that day we would not have need for debates like this, and yet here we are. It is 2016, and we are still talking about it.

• (1555)

I know the Liberal government regularly defends its position by pointing out the \$684 million it has set aside over five years. However, the Liberals regularly fail to mention the fact that over half of that money will not come until the year of the next federal election in 2019 or the year after. That is a very long time for children in crisis to wait. The budget shortfall has been identified as \$216 million by Cindy Blackstock. The Liberals only proposed \$71 million, which is \$155 million less than what is needed. It is not an arbitrary number, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs has stated in this House. We are not making up this number.

Business of Supply

There has been an admission by the government that the budget response was developed by the previous Conservative government under Stephen Harper, again part of that real change that was promised. This shows that the government had not even seen the decision in January before it went ahead with the response, which was totally inadequate.

While on the topic of the budget, I would like to point out the following fact. Governing is about making priorities and decisions, and the Liberal members of Parliament in this House decided to give themselves a \$670 tax break costing \$1.2 billion to our treasury; and the Liberals are arguing over \$155 million for first nations children. If that does not get people angry, I do not know what does.

Discrimination against indigenous children and peoples is one of the oldest and greatest shames of our history. The Manitoba legislature, just yesterday, passed a unanimous motion that outlined the situation. It should be noted that the member for Winnipeg North has a personal familial connection to that. His daughter was part of that unanimous decision in that legislature. Some of the highlights of the motion's points include that first nations education is underfunded, with 30% less money spent on each indigenous student than the national average; there has been a 2% cap to funding increases to social services on reserve since the Liberal government of 1996, which has entirely failed to keep up with the growing indigenous population; and many health care services are routinely denied to first nations people, when they would otherwise be covered.

The fact is that the Liberals are not living up to their word. The Prime Minister has stated that no relationship is more important to him and to Canada than the one with indigenous children. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's government is fighting families in court to deny care. As a standard government practice, children are still being denied critical medical procedures, and we have so many examples, far more than we can count. I know the member for Timmins—James Bay regularly brings them up in this House. The Prime Minister is still taking advice from those who were in Stephen Harper's government who led the fight against first nations children receiving care.

In my concluding remarks, I will say that the Liberals often try to shift the attention of caring Canadians to their first steps in “historic investments”, and they regularly excuse their non-compliance with the excuse that they just cannot change things overnight. Did Canada fail to meet its obligation when it brought in 30,000 Syrians? No, we stepped up to the plate then. We have stepped up to the plate regularly in this country when the time has called for action, and there is absolutely no excuse for the government not to do so now.

As I look at the motion that has been brought forward by our party, I plead with Liberal members of Parliament. I plead with the government to join us in this House and make this a unanimous motion. Let us close the funding gap. Let us fully implement Jordan's principle. Let us fully comply with all the orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Let us stop fighting indigenous families in court. I ask the government to please make public all of the documents related to the overhaul of child welfare and the implementation of Jordan's principle.

Let us get the job done this time. This is our moment in history to repair our relationship with first nations people.

● (1600)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoy debates, but I also really enjoy informed debates.

What I will say is that the debate today is very misguided. It is misguided simply because we should be debating how we are going to reform the entire child care and child welfare system for children on first nations, because the government is already implementing the recommendations of the tribunal and accepting Jordan's principle.

My colleague talked about our not dealing with the 2% freeze, the cap that has been implemented on first nations' budgets. I want to remind the member that we have. This year we have invested an additional \$1.2 billion over and above the \$107 million that would have been provided with the 2% cap. Because we have lifted it, \$1.2 billion extra will go to first nations this year. The total funding over the next four years of our office will increase from the 2% cap to 22%. I want to make sure the member is aware of that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the parliamentary secretary that the Liberal platform, as it showed earlier this year, had a \$1.7 billion funding gap announced, because it was relying on what they thought was pre-existing funding that they supposed existed from 2016 to 2019-2020. The problem is that there was no existence of this funding in three primary sets of government financial documentation. It was not in existence in the main estimates, the public accounts, or the reports on plans and priorities.

Therefore, if we want to talk about facts and gaps, the Liberals are very clever at moving the numbers around and making it seem as if what they have promised is going to fix everything, but when we get to the real action, it is all hat and no cattle.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the very essence of the matter before the House right now concerns a fact that I think is indisputable, which is that there has been a finding by a quasi judicial tribunal on a number of occasions now that establishes conclusively that the amount of money the federal government spends for the education of first nation children in this country is substantially lower than what is spent on non-aboriginal children, period. I do not think there is anybody in the House who can stand up and deny that fact.

The second thing I think we have to recognize is that this has been a long-standing, chronic problem. It has been an issue that has existed through Conservative governments and Liberal governments before them.

What does my hon. colleague think the present government needs to do right now? What concrete steps can be taken to start addressing this very real discrepancy that the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has found, so that we can make sure first nations children receive exactly the kind of education that they deserve and that every other child in this country is getting?

Business of Supply

•(1605)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I alluded to some of that during the course of my speech. I pointed out the fact that all the Liberal members of Parliament in the House voted to give themselves a \$670 tax credit, which applied to people making between \$89,000 and \$200,000 a year, and that is going to come at a budget shortfall of \$1.2 billion. Yet, we cannot address the funding shortfall for first nation kids, which has been identified as \$155 million in this year alone. How much longer will our country have to go through with this kind of continued relationship with first nations?

As my colleague for Vancouver Kingsway has pointed out, we need to look at the recommendations that were put forward in the tribunal. We need to close the very clear, black-and-white, identified funding gap and finally get onto the right promise. For far too long, successive federal governments have been making promises and not living up to them.

As my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley so adroitly pointed out, first nations are now getting in on this game. They know exactly what to expect, and that is a sad fact of the state of affairs of our nation.

Mr. Earl Dreshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I would like to let everyone know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake.

Mr. Speaker, about 40 years ago, I had the opportunity to go to Saddle Lake. I was there for the centennial commemoration of the signing of Treaty No. 6. I took a memento from there, which I kept in my classroom for the 32 years I was teaching, and it has been in my office, as well.

It is the saying “as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows”. It is so critical and it is also the main reason I have the commitment I do to our aboriginal communities.

In the city of Red Deer and in Mountain View and Red Deer counties we do not have a reserve, but we do have friendship centres. We have some great people who make sure that these friendship centres are able to give some security and some information to our community, and of course, we have great elders who work with us to help the children.

I was on the Standing Committee for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I had the opportunity to travel with our committee to northern Canada and to be in each of the territories to talk to the people, who feel that there are severe barriers to development.

Part of it has to do with the way funding can come in, but a lot of it has to do with how they are managing to keep their people together and are helping those who are in serious condition.

As a teacher, when our government came in with the first nations education act, I asked if I could come back on the aboriginal affairs committee so that we could see it through and see all the things we knew would help in the education field.

I was saddened to see that fail, but I am also saddened by the treatment of children on reserve.

One of the other things I did when I first was engaged with aboriginal affairs was read a book called *Dances with Dependency* by Calvin Helin. He offered strategies to eliminate welfare dependency and to help eradicate poverty among our indigenous population. He reframed the prevailing impoverishment and despair directly as a dependence mindset forged by welfare economics and advocated a return of native peoples' 10,000-year tradition of self-reliance based on personal responsibility and cultural awareness.

There are many examples of native groups that are trying to follow this path. Although that might be a great goal to strive for, it does not mean that it is a reality, nor is it likely to be obtained in the near future.

That is why this particular motion is so important. I want to thank the member from Timmins—James Bay for presenting it today.

The first part of the motion speaks to investing \$155 million in new funding for the delivery of child welfare and looking ahead to have adequate funding in the future.

We have heard in our discussion today that it was not that difficult for the Liberals to spend \$4.3 billion outside of Canada, but they could not find \$155 million for Canada's most vulnerable children. Some of the reasons that have been given have to do with the Liberals' commitment and their failure to deliver.

The Conservative government ended the boil water advisories on reserves and were looking at ways to improve it. The Liberals committed \$360 million a year, whereas our Conservative government had been averaging \$400 million a year previously.

With respect to funding for mental wellness on reserves, the Liberal commitment was \$271 million, whereas we had been providing \$300 million for that same commitment.

With respect to a broken education system, the Liberals committed to \$2.6 billion over five years, with no plan to fix the current system. We looked at equivalent dollars but with a plan that was designed by and for first nation communities. There were minimum standards for education certification, core curriculum, and graduation requirements. This is such a critical part of helping communities, especially when we look at the situations that occur as students move in and out of school into difficulties they may have and as they are involved with the welfare system.

•(1610)

I knew Jean Crowder very well and enjoyed being on the aboriginal affairs committee with her. Bringing in Jordan's principle was so very important at the time, and it is important that we continue to recognize its significance. It aims to make sure that first nations children can access public services ordinarily available to other Canadian children without experiencing the service denials, delays, or disruptions related to their first nation status.

The payment disputes between federal and provincial governments over services for first nations children are not uncommon. What is important is that we need care first. We can worry about jurisdiction later.

Business of Supply

It includes all the services. It includes services in education, health, child care, recreation, culture, and language. Jordan's principle calls on the government of first contact to pay for the services and to seek reimbursement later so that a child does not get tragically caught in the middle of government red tape, as was the case with Jordan.

On January 26, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the federal government to immediately stop applying a limited and discriminatory definition of Jordan's principle and to immediately take measures to implement the full meaning and scope of the principle. That is what we are hoping for today.

It is a case of complying with the orders made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and stopping the practice of fighting indigenous families in court who are seeking access to services covered by the federal government. Certainly that money would be better spent giving services than paying legal costs.

The final point in the motion is a discussion of the Human Rights Tribunal. It found that the federal government's funding model and management of first nations child and family services resulted in denials of service and created various adverse impacts for many first nations children and families living on reserve.

The decision also says that the government must cease this discriminatory practice and take measures to redress and prevent it. It calls for a redesign of the child welfare system and its funding model, urging the use of experts to ensure that first nations are given culturally appropriate services.

In the discussions we have heard today, that has been one of the questions. How are we going to redefine this, and what are we going to do to redesign the child welfare system? We know what the situation is right now, and we recognize the need to act immediately.

Many times, on the aboriginal affairs committee, Cindy Blackstock would come and speak about issues and concerns. This is an opportunity for us to take that one step further.

The final part of the motion is to make public all pertinent documents related to the overhaul of child welfare and the implementation of Jordan's principle. It is important that we all look at this and realize that it is a point of accountability as well. We are talking about putting more money into a system. We have all looked at transparency and at ways in which this can be done properly. This is a great opportunity for us to bring those two things together. Having the dollars that are sent spent in the proper manner is what we should all be striving for.

We can do better as a government. First nations people want to do better for their children. They want to return to their 10,000-year tradition of self-reliance, so let us work together to make this happen.

• (1615)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I find ironic is that what we are doing today as a Liberal government is something that should have been done in this country a long time ago. It should have been done by the former government, the party of the member opposite.

When the rulings came in 2007 to accept Jordan's principle, why did his government not accept it? It was when we came into office in the last year that the Liberal Party of Canada, under the Prime Minister, accepted Jordan's principle and accepted our urgent responsibility to care for first nation children across the country.

I find it so ironic to hear members today who had that opportunity for many years but failed to act. I would like to know the reason.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, that is what we have done. There are changes and situations that need to now come into play. Whether or not it was completed in the way it should have been, this is something we need to continue looking at.

It is interesting that today the Liberals speak about all the things they are going to do. The government ends up being constantly pushed into action, as on the Yazidi genocide that we looked at, and even on the Liberal private members' bills we dealt with last night, the review of aboriginal youth welfare, and the special envoy. These were in reaction to the good work presented here on Yazidis and the good work being presented by the NDP today about Jordan's principle.

The Liberals are reactive. There were things done on Jordan's principle, and we were proud to be part of that.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that dollars invested in child welfare save lives. Do the Conservatives believe that with a budget deficit of over \$30 billion there is any justification for the Liberal government not finding an additional \$155 million for child welfare services, as required by a court of law? I would like the member to respond.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, in the last election campaign, there were many things said in the to and fro that took place. The NDP looked at how to manage this situation and felt that it could be done responsibly and without creating a deficit.

Certainly, when the Liberals have gone three times higher on the credit card they asked the Canadian people for, and that is where they have gone, they should have been able to find \$155 million to help out our Canadian children.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, the motion on the floor today is asking the government to conform to the ruling of the tribunal, which we are already doing. It asks us to accept Jordan's principle and to fund it appropriately, which we are already doing. It also asks us to fund it based on the numbers the NDP sees as fit, not on what the court ruling says. The court ruling says it should be funded based on need.

I would like to ask the Conservatives what their view is on that.

• (1620)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I have faith in the work by the Conservative Party on this particular position. I have faith in the work done by the NDP in bringing this very important issue forward. It is important for us to realize that it is time something is done about this.

Business of Supply

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and humbled to serve as a committee member for the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. When the government committed to reconciliation and the Prime Minister vowed to enact the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation report, it was clear the committee would be working on pressing issues.

The committee began with an introduction to indigenous issues. During the meetings, we heard how the residential school system affected indigenous families and their culture. Although residential schools are often thought of as being an issue of the past, the lasting effects are still a major hurdle that continues to plague indigenous people. Many of the witnesses who appeared before the committee had gone to residential schools or have family members who attended.

Residential schools were designed to break their culture. From their mother tongue to their spiritual beliefs, indigenous people had to give up who they were, but the greatest trauma was caused by forcefully being removed from their families.

When the children returned, they went back to families and a culture of which they were no longer a part. Often indigenous people had no way to cope with the trauma. They began to develop mental health issues because there was no belief that things would get better. Many of the survivors turned to drugs and alcohol to deal with their pain. Without being healthy, they could not hold jobs and often fell into poverty.

It was shocking to hear that the suicide rate in indigenous communities across the country ran up to 11 times higher than the non-indigenous rate. They may have survived the residential schools, but by not having the resources in place to deal with their trauma, the cycle often continues.

Indigenous communities still experience the trauma of losing their children daily in our country. First nations, child, and family services take children from their parents everyday due to neglect. Unfortunately, these children find themselves removed from their families, culture, and communities when they are placed in provincial custody in the south.

Right now, according to experts, it is not uncommon for 6% of children on reserves to be in state care. In some communities, the numbers can double. This is totally unacceptable.

In 2005, many Canadians across the country were exposed to how broken the system was with the passing of Jordan River Anderson. Jordan was born with a rare muscular disorder. Due to his disorder, Jordan spent the first two years of his life in a hospital away from his family. When doctors determined that he was ready to go home, he could not. There was an issue with Health Canada and First Nations Child and Family Services. While on the reserve, the health care of indigenous people is provided by Health Canada and is paid for by the federal government.

Jordan was in a medical foster home because the treatment he needed was only available in Winnipeg, 800 kilometres away from his home. Medical foster homes fall under the care of First Nations Child and Family Services, which is funded by the provinces. Jordan needed medical treatments at home, but the federal and provincial

governments could not agree on who would be responsible to fund his home care. Instead of going home, Jordan was forced to wait.

Two years later, Jordan died at the age of five, alone in Winnipeg. Jordan never had the opportunity to live with his loving family. He never had a real home. As a father, I find this story painful to tell. I cannot imagine having a child who did not receive care because neither level of government wanted to take responsibility. While some find Jordan's story shocking, first nation Canadians from across the country know this story is still a common one.

No child should ever be put in Jordan's situation. That is why Jordan's principle was developed. We must take a common sense approach to services. Child welfare should come first. An indigenous child should never receive services that are less than their non-indigenous peers because of provincial and federal funding disputes.

Members of Parliament on both sides of the House showed that they agreed with this sentiment in 2007 when they unanimously voted in favour of private member's motion, Motion No. 296, stating that "the government should immediately adopt a child first principle, based on Jordan's Principle, to resolve jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations children".

• (1625)

The vote may have been unanimous, but the problem did not end with the adoption of Motion No. 296. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its report, the third call to action was, "We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's principle". On the indigenous and northern affairs committee, we heard Jordan's principle mentioned constantly. There are still first nations children who do not have the same access to services and opportunities as every Canadian child. The stories are just as heartbreaking as Jordan's.

The Liberal Party made a variety of large commitments to the indigenous people of our country. The Liberals have promised a new nation-to-nation relationship with our indigenous people. They also call for record funding to indigenous programs, and the implementation of the TRC call to action. They also called for the implementation of the call to action on Jordan's principle.

We already know the Liberal government has a questionable track record on its promises. Its first budget exposed what many Canadians already knew, that the Liberal Party was the party that would tell us what we wanted to hear, but not necessarily what it would do.

Just as expected, budget 2016 failed to deliver on several large commitments to indigenous Canadians. The record funding that had been promised was often less than what the previous Conservative government had committed to.

While the Liberals promised to implement the Jordan principle, budget 2016 only included \$71 million for child welfare. This was far short of the \$108.1 million that the former Conservative government, in 2012, said was the shortfall.

Business of Supply

The Liberals claim that their promises of \$634.8 million over five years will make things right. Over half of that is budgeted after the next election, which can only be described as a plan to deflect criticism.

While the Liberal government can break most of its promises without consequences, Jordan's principle is a matter of human right. The principle was brought before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal by the Assembly of First Nations and Blackstock, the executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. The tribunal ruled the government was not respecting the rights of indigenous Canadians.

In July, the Liberal government submitted a compliance report to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in which it committed to investing up to \$382 million. The Liberals also claimed they were compliant.

The stakeholders were skeptical. Blackstock's lawyers said the government's response was vague. He was right. The government presented figures with no plan or timeline.

The tribunal agreed with Blackstock. The government was not in compliance. The tribunal found that the government had a narrow interpretation of what medical needs needed to be covered, only focusing on acute and complex medical situations. The government had adopted a policy that only applied to indigenous people on reserve.

This was not the government attempting to live up to its commitments to first nations. This was the Liberal government attempting to do the bare minimum. We cannot do the bare minimum when the welfare of children is on the line.

We cannot keep going back and forth in court. We need to move forward on this issue.

When my colleague, the member of Parliament for Timmins—James Bay presented his motion, he put forward an opportunity to end the stories we have heard too often in the media and first hand at committee. He has also put forward a motion that all sides of the House can agree on, not because the tribunal is involved but because it is the right thing to do.

The New Democrats support the motion. Many of my Conservative colleagues and I support the motion. Now it is up to the Liberals to make a decision. Hopefully it is for the children.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have enormous respect for the work my colleague does on our committee. Today we have seen a government that seems to believe the compliance order of the tribunal does not apply to it. The Liberals have ridiculed the shortfall numbers, saying they were made up, or pulled out of thin air or, as I think the minister said, cooked up in a back room. These numbers have been put forward by Cindy Blackstock to the tribunal and they have gone unanswered.

I want to ask my colleague about his concerns on the residential schools. He has heard the intimate connection between the suicide crisis and the residential schools. He has brought forward a motion to committee to study the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation commission. The first four recommen-

dations are about the overhaul of the child welfare system and the implementation of Jordan's principle.

The New Democrats support the view that we should be looking to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the implementation, as my colleague does. I am concerned the Liberals are walking away on those commitments.

I want to ask my hon. colleague if he is concerned about any efforts that would happen at our committee if we did not take the time to find out whether the government is actually serious about implementing the promises of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We know the Prime Minister said that would be his priority.

It will come before committee. We have not voted yet. Does my colleague have any concerns that the Liberals are against reviewing something as simple and straightforward as whether Canada is in compliance with the recommendations in the call to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report?

• (1630)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Mr. Speaker, yes, I am definitely concerned. Many witnesses have spoken and they are concerned that all the TRC recommendations have to be implemented. There is a feeling that this study would be pushed aside, and I share that with my colleagues from the Conservative side and the NDP side.

Looking forward, if we want to make real change, we have to push forward on the TRC recommendations, and we have to get the grassroots feelings from the communities as witnesses. Moving forward, hopefully I do not see the Liberals shutting our study down. There is always hope.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things my colleague raised was about the government not coming forward with enough money, in his opinion. We took very seriously the ruling of the tribunal. In fact, we know the system is broken and that it has to be reformed as it relates to child services on reserve. That is why we moved immediately to invest urgent funding, \$71 million this year.

The amount called for today in the opposition motion is arbitrary. It is not rooted in a real assessment of need. The tribunal said that the government should invest based on need. Does the member think governments should invest based on the need for financial support for children in first nations, or just based on a number that the NDP would like to put in a motion?

Mr. David Yurdiga: Mr. Speaker, with need, has to come money. They cannot have both. The Liberals have set aside \$634.6 million worth of child welfare funding, and most of it will not be seen until after the next federal election. Are the Liberals trying to justify their negligence by saying that of that \$634.6 million, they cannot find the money to fund this potential life-saving initiative?

Business of Supply

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House to speak to the opposition day motion put forward by our party. I want to acknowledge the important work of my colleague, the member of Parliament for Timmins—James Bay.

This opposition day motion is very important to the people I represent in my home of northern Manitoba. I want to share the language of this motion so that people at home and those who are tuning in know exactly what we are putting forward here today. It reads:

That the House call on the government to comply with the historic ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordering the end of discrimination against First Nations children, including by:

- (a) immediately investing an additional \$155 million in new funding for the delivery of child welfare that has been identified as the shortfall this year alone, and establishing a funding plan for future years that will end the systemic shortfalls in First Nations child welfare;
- (b) implementing the full definition of Jordan's Principle as outlined in a resolution passed by the House on December 12, 2007;
- (c) fully complying with all orders made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and committing to stop fighting Indigenous families in court who are seeking access to services covered by the federal government; and
- (d) making public all pertinent documents related to the overhaul of child welfare and the implementation of Jordan's Principle.

Before I go on, I would like to indicate that I will splitting my time with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

The opposition day motion I just read is extremely fundamental. We are talking about addressing the systemic underfunding of first nations child welfare. We are talking about implementation of a decision on the historic matter of Jordan's principle, which we all supported in 2007, nine years ago. It is about complying with the orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. It is about stopping the fight against indigenous families who are seeking justice. This motion is fundamental to the work we should be doing as parliamentarians.

However, it is also deeply troubling that one year after a new government was elected, a government that made all sorts of commitments to first nation people, that we have had to put such a motion forward because the government has been failing first nation people so deeply in our country. I want to spend a moment reflecting on how disturbing it is that we have to stand once again in the House to call on federal leadership when it comes to Jordan's principle.

Jordan's principle was named after a little guy from my constituency, Jordan Anderson, from Norway House Cree Nation. Jordan's experience of being shuffled back and forth between the provincial and federal system is, sadly, the inspiration behind Jordan's principle.

Jordan, because of the illness he faced and the way in which the federal government and the provincial government dealt with him, was not able to be at home with his family. Sadly, because of the chronic underfunding by the federal government of first nations, and first nations youth in particular, Jordan could not even spend the last days of his life at home with the people he loved.

Jordan's family and the leaders of his community, like Mike Muswagon and many others, fought for justice for Jordan, but they went beyond that. They said that no first nation child deserved to live

through what Jordan had experienced, and that a first nation child, no matter where they are from, ought to have the same access to health care, safe housing, and services if they have disabilities, and the same kind of dignity, as any other child in Canada.

Nine years ago, parliamentarians stood in support of Jordan's principle, and I, like my other colleagues, want to acknowledge the hard work of Jean Crowder, a member of Parliament that I had the privilege of working with, who put forward Jordan's principle in the House. It is absurd that so many years later, despite the promises by the government across the way and its hollow commitments to first nations people, we have to once again ask it to fulfill its commitment to Jordan's principle.

● (1635)

I have the honour of representing 41 first nations in my constituency. Day in and day out in my constituency, I see the incredible energy that so many young people in first nations and Métis communities have across our north. However, over the last number of years, I have also seen the incredible challenges and massive barriers they have faced, particularly on reserve. We can trace all of those barriers to the inherent neglect we have seen from the federal government, to the decades of underfunding of first nations health care, housing, education, infrastructure and, more broadly, services. We can also trace it back to the colonial mentality in which Liberal and Conservative governments have imposed patriarchal views on first nations people, seeking assimilation, practising genocidal acts, and ensuring that first nation people do not live the lives that so many other Canadians live in terms of dignity.

Yesterday I was honoured to host a one-of-a-kind forum on Parliament Hill. It focused on the rise of precarious work in the millennial generation. We heard loud and clear from indigenous speakers about the particular barriers that indigenous youth face in our country. That is perhaps most emblematic in the experiences of children and young people who have grown up in the system of child and family services, the child welfare system, young people who have often been left to their own devices, who have faced incredible abuse, and who we know will be living with the impacts of that kind of neglect for years and even generations to come.

One of the most powerful speakers yesterday was Tasha Spillett, a Nehiyaw woman from Winnipeg, whose roots are in our north. She talked about the dangers of being, as she called it, "young and brown" in Canada. She talked about the impacts of colonization and the marginalization of indigenous youth in our country. In her speech, she connected these broader issues to a very real example of the way in which indigenous youth in our country are facing abuse. She chose to focus on perhaps one of the most powerful examples of the way in which indigenous lives are shown by some to not matter in our country, that being the case of Colten Boushie, a young man who was killed in August of this very year. He was a 22-year old Cree man from Red Pheasant Cree Nation who was shot and killed by a white farmer after approaching a farmhouse in Saskatchewan.

Tasha talked about the need for justice for Colten, as have others, such as Erica Violet Lee, an incredible writer who is also based in Saskatchewan. In one of the articles Erica wrote, she talked about the importance of asking why indigenous values, and particularly the lives of indigenous youth, are devalued in our country.

Business of Supply

She asked:

What is it like to live with a fear of Native people so intense that a second thought is not spared on loading your rifle and shooting a young Cree man dead who simply dared to cross your fence-line?

She continued:

Despite the foreign weight that bears on our bodies, Native folks are just like you

—meaning non-indigenous people—

at least in some ways.

She went on to say:

We take naps in the August heat, we go for long drives to the river, we swim, we fall in love. The difference is that we do all these things in a county that long ago decided Native freedom, Native love and Native life are, more than anything else, a threat. A threat to westward expansion, to Canadian civilization, to private property, to your farm tractor. Take your pick.

She went on to say:

In the few remaining warm days of this year, Native people will continue doing what we have always done, since time immemorial, in our prairie homelands

—meaning surviving, thriving, and resisting.

• (1640)

My concluding message to the government is that if we are going to make it clear to indigenous youth that their lives matter, supporting and fulfilling this motion is one important step in doing that.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Courtenay—Alberni, Indigenous Affairs; the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, National Defence; the hon. member for Saskatoon West, Status of Women.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her heartfelt comments and commitment to an issue that is not going to be undone with \$155 million. The 150 years of failed Confederation combined with 500 years of failed contact have left us a massive problem that needs to be undone immediately.

The NDP has identified a fixed dollar amount, not \$154 million, not \$156 million, not \$200 million, but \$155 million, a very specific dollar amount. As we look at 623 distinct aboriginal communities across 10 provinces and three territories, combined with the responsibilities of municipal and provincial governments, how much will her province get out of the \$155 million and, in particular, what will the precise share be for the community that she identified out of the \$155 million, since the NDP has come up with such a precise formula down to the child?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the member across that the number identified here is the number that has been put forward by a renowned human rights activist and indigenous

advocate, Cindy Blackstock. So if the member is prepared to go back to his riding and talk about his need to oppose Cindy Blackstock and the measures she has put forth, that is something he is going to grapple with.

What really strikes me here is the way in which the Liberals are flailing to come up with excuses to say no to this motion. The motion is fundamental. We are talking about stopping the fight against indigenous families. We are talking about the implementation of Jordan's principle. We are talking about addressing the chronic underfunding of child welfare. These are all the bullet points that the Liberals want to say no to.

We had a prime minister who committed to the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We are still waiting. We had ministers who talk about the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, but who conveniently leave out the word "implementation". We have a prime minister and a government that use rhetoric to make themselves look better when it comes to indigenous people's issues. So if they want to actually match their talk with action, supporting the motion is the way to go. Indigenous people will see right through their opposition to the motion as a betrayal of the government's commitments to them in the election campaign.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am having a hard time understanding the difficulty that my hon. Liberal colleagues have in supporting a motion that is clearly drafted and absolutely unassailable. It calls on the House to have the government comply with the ruling of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to end the discrimination. It asks the government to immediately invest an additional \$155 million in new funding for the delivery of child welfare. That has been identified as the shortfall this year alone by Cindy Blackstock. It asks the House to implement the full definition of Jordan's principle as passed by a resolution of the House; to comply with all orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal; and to make public all pertinent documents relating to the overhaul of child welfare.

My question for my hon. colleague is quite simple. What possibly could any member of the House have difficulty with if they truly believe in ending systemic discrimination and helping first nations children in this country?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that important question. He is absolutely right. What possible logical reason could they have to say no to ending systemic discrimination against first nations youth?

The one reason I could see is to be right in line with previous Liberal governments when it comes to first nations people. It was under Liberal rule that we saw the chronic underfunding of first nations overall. In the nineties, the Liberals brought in the 2% cap. They told first nations they had to share the so-called burden for the government's cutbacks, when in fact first nations people have borne the burden for centuries when it comes to Canadian government.

Business of Supply

Basically, what we are talking about here is a Liberal government that has talked a big talk when it comes to working with indigenous peoples in Canada, yet it is not willing to shore it up with action. It is not willing to address the underfunding of first nations. It is coming up with some pretty half-baked excuses as to why it cannot do that. It is willing to go up against incredible advocates, like Cindy Blackstock.

Indigenous youth and indigenous communities are seeing through this kind of rhetoric. They expect leadership. They expect the Liberal government to support our NDP motion to end the systemic discrimination in first nations child welfare.

• (1650)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague from the other side of the bay for bringing the motion forward. I am honoured to be his colleague and am very grateful that he brought the motion forward.

On January 26, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found the Government of Canada was racially discriminating against 163,000 first nations children. This is not something that happened in the past. This is happening today, in 2016. In fact, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the government to resolve the problem at the “first reasonable occasion”, according to its own words. That first reasonable opportunity was on March 22 when the government presented its budget, and resolution did not happen.

I would like to share with the House something that Cindy Blackstock taught me. There are several things that have always been true about the government's relationship with indigenous children. The government has always known about the wrongs at the time they were perpetuated, the degree of harm at the time they were perpetrated, and has always known of solutions to fix the problems, but chose not to do it.

Canada's first public health officer, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, found that 24% of children who went to residential schools were dying every year and if those children were followed over three years, that number increased to 47%. Dr. Bryce said that the health science at that time knew exactly what to do to save many of those children. The government at the time said it was too expensive and retaliated against the doctor for speaking out in defence of indigenous kids.

Deliberate inaction on the part of government to prevent the deaths of children amounts to manslaughter. Those are not my words. Those are the words of a respected lawyer who examined Dr. Bryce's report in the 1920s. There are key elements to Dr. Bryce's story that are instructive in the case of the 163,000 kids today. First, the government knows about the preventable deaths of children. Second, they have the solutions to fix it. Third, they have chosen not to obey the order of the tribunal to prevent further harm, and in fact retaliates against and resists those who demand better. Fourth, it can get away with it if members of Parliament allow it. We cannot make the same mistake twice.

The findings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal are so contrary to the ideals that Canadians adhere to and identify with. Racial discrimination is not tolerated in Canada in 2016. It is easier to tell ourselves that we have accomplished the Canadian ideal than

to face and remedy the inequalities that the Government of Canada continues to perpetrate. It is much easier to think that the residential schools are a tragedy of the past. However, through its policies and programs, the government continues to actively racially discriminate against hundreds of thousands of children, little kids, in this country.

Today I have heard many excuses from the other side. I heard the government speak about the current funding levels of their programs, but none of the government members had the courage to stand and acknowledge that the discrimination still has not been remedied. It is continuing the policies of the past. It knows it is perpetrating harm and has chosen not to fix the problem. I will not sit quietly and allow the government to discriminate against little boys and girls in this country anymore.

The government said that the problem cannot be fixed overnight. It has said repeatedly that it cannot fix this problem overnight, that it will take time and consultation, and that it has made a good first step. Why is it that in 2016 indigenous kids are being asked to be grateful for a government that is only willing to take one baby step?

• (1655)

In the brave work of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, one little girl defined racial discrimination as “when the government doesn't think you're worth the money”. If that is how children feel today, in this country, do we really have to ask ourselves why we have a suicide crisis in so many communities in Canada? Children as young as 10 do not feel as though their lives are worth the same as those in other municipalities.

For those of us who have children, for those of us who have grandchildren, and who care for children in our lives, imagine if we were told that our children were not worth the money. What part of that statement is acceptable? If it is acceptable, then what is it that we can do, today, to make substantial and meaningful changes to improve the quality of life for first nation kids in this country?

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is not over. Senator Murray Sinclair explained that it has taken 150 years to get us in the mess we are in today, and that it may take 150 years to fix it. However, that was not an invitation to do nothing. That was not an invitation to not take major steps today as we approach 150 years of this country.

The government must, as quickly as possible, ensure that there will never again be another generation of indigenous children who have to recover from their childhoods and that there will never again be another generation of non-indigenous children who have to say, “I'm sorry”.

[*Translation*]

I have often said that Canada is a country of unfulfilled promise.

Business of Supply

How do we explain that such a rich country and a G7 member is still unable to improve the lot of first nations, the lot of the first peoples of this land, and especially the lot of indigenous women and girls, as well as that of the most vulnerable and marginalized children in the country?

To date, not one but two orders have been ignored by this government.

Why does the opposition have to move a motion to ensure compliance with these two orders? That makes no sense for a democracy such as ours.

When we reach the point that a tribunal's rulings are not followed, even though there is an order to comply, we wonder what will happen to the other promises made by this government to Canada's first nations.

I invite all members of the House to vote in favour of the motion because it is the only right thing to do in this country today.

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to stand in the House with my colleague across the way. His commitment to this matter is profoundly respected.

What we are grappling with here is this notion that the \$155 million voted on today will solve anything specific tomorrow. The question I ask is very specific. How much of this \$155 million will be assigned to the children in the riding of the member opposite? Because what we are grappling with is a government that has a government-to-government relationship with hundreds of communities and nations across this country, through treaties and legal agreements, as a mechanism to turn that \$155 million into a real impact in real children's lives.

What we are concerned about, as a government, is that, yes, we can identify \$155 million, which I do not think will solve 500 years of racism in any way, shape, or form, in and of itself. However, how do we split that up in an equitable, just way that honours treaties and recognizes aboriginal title to the money that the New Democrats seek to make available?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Toronto for that question.

First, none of this \$155 million would go to my riding because it is largely covered by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and we have our own arrangements in that part of the country.

Second, the government has had this figure for a long time. Cindy Blackstock has submitted documents to at least demonstrate where this money is particularly needed, and that was the figure that was presented to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. The Liberals knew about it, so it is way higher than what they are proposing in their budget and what they are proposing after the next election, if they remain there. I do not think that is going to happen. I am pretty sure.

Third, one of the things we need to realize in this discussion is that the amount is identified for this year alone, I believe. There is a lot of work to be done. I agree that we cannot fix 500 years of discrimination. That is going to take a while. However, that is not an invitation that was given by Senator Sinclair. That was not an invitation not to do anything at this time.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have such enormous respect for my colleague, and he knows what institutional attempts to destroy families mean; he has lived it.

What we are talking about today is a compliance order by the Human Rights Tribunal, and we hear the Liberals making things up in the House, claiming that these numbers came out of thin air when the government has had the numbers for eight months and has offered no counter-numbers. For the minister to stand in this House and say these numbers were pulled out of thin air, to me is a slap in the face to the work of Cindy Blackstock and all the people on the ground who did this work and brought forward these numbers.

Given the Liberals' sudden concern that they have to consult and they are going to get an online portal, it is a question of priorities. Look at the Site C project. What the Minister of Justice said was a complete overriding of indigenous rights. The indigenous people asked the government to work with the communities on those permits, but the Liberals rubber-stamped those permits immediately because it was a priority for the Prime Minister. It was the same with the LNG project. When the chiefs came here to talk, the Liberals were already in Vancouver approving it. They did not set up a consultation process.

Why is it that the Liberals can take all the time in the world when we have children dying in my riding, dying in northwestern Ontario, dying and being denied basic services? That is what we are talking about. It is pennies for these children, but the Liberals can take all the time in the world to consult.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is right. I have a lot of experience with governments that refuse to comply with tribunals' orders and violate the constitutional rights of first peoples. Not many MPs have lived in residential schools; I might be the only one, and I spent 10 years there. I know my story.

It is important to remember that, in this country, a tribunal's ruling means something. If the government needs constant reminders about the meaning of law and order, we have a bit of a problem. I have often heard members talk about the rule of law, but they do not really understand what that means. It means respecting our institutions, including the tribunals that are set up to deal with injustices perpetrated in this country properly, injustices such as those that indigenous peoples have endured for 150 years.

Federal governments, be they Liberal or Conservative, have been fighting indigenous peoples in court for 150 years. Each and every time, their approach is adversarial. Never has the federal government argued for the rights of indigenous people in court, not even once.

Next year, we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation. It might be time for a shift in attitude, because the current one is incompatible with reconciliation.

Business of Supply

• (1705)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we recognize the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister to resume debate, I will let him know that it is a 20-minute speaking slot, but we will have to interrupt him in about nine minutes, at 5:15, that being the ordinary time for the business of supply to end. We will get going, just the same. He has nine minutes. How much of that he chooses to use for his speech and/or questions and comments will be up to him.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, without trying to make light of the serious situation, I will try to speak quickly and maybe I can do the 20 minutes in nine.

Members cannot sit in this House today and not think that this issue is the seminal issue in front of us as a generation of Canadians. In fact, I do not think I ever have. The testimony that comes directly from those members who are indigenous in this House—aboriginal, Métis, or Inuit—moves us to action as no other voice in this country should or could.

There are a few things we should recognize. It has become a new custom in the east, and I know from my time in Vancouver that it has been a much longer custom there, to acknowledge the territory we are on as we make remarks as politicians. It is not often done in the House because of time constraints, but in public speaking engagements, as we move from community to community, we now seek to find out where we stand as we speak and to acknowledge the traditional peoples who have put up with us in ways that are unimaginable to many.

We stand here on Algonquin territory today. We know that there are children of Algonquin families in this city who do not enjoy the rights that children enjoy who have come to this country from all over the world. This has to be fixed. The government is committed to changing that. However, it is a complex process. We have inherited 500 years of colonialism, racism, death, and tragedy, and the scars of those tragedies live on in the lives of far too many people in our communities.

I do not think there is a division across that emotion in this House as we speak of these issues. What we are seized with is to find the best way forward, and not to take baby steps or single steps but to march forward together for the first time in this country's history, toward a future that does not discriminate based on whether one is born on or off a reserve, with or without defined lineage because of technical or bureaucratic decisions.

We have to find a way to share this country in the spirit that has been taught to us and shown to us—and that we have ignored—by the first nations and the first peoples of the communities we all come from. That change has to happen. This government is committed to it.

Will there be debates about whether \$154 million or \$155 million, or the \$200 million that was originally spoken of following the decision, is the right amount? Yes, there will be debates about the amount. There will be debates about the mechanism by which that money flows, and the relationships that are established nation to

nation, and even in those areas where no nation-to-nation relationship has yet been established. Those negotiations must happen and will happen, and hopefully will bring us to that new future.

We have been talking about the ruling from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, a ruling that does not specify \$155 million, which is why we wonder sometimes exactly how this dollar amount has been arrived at, and exactly how it will impact across this country, child by child, community by community, treaty by treaty, nation by nation. We are grappling with that.

That is the issue we are grappling with, not the principle or the spirit of the motion, not the intent of the motion, but the functionality of the motion. I was in the opposition in the previous Parliament, and it is easy for opposition members to say that is the right way and if the government does not follow it, they disagree with us. The reality is that we agree with the direction. What we are trying to figure out is how to get those dollars into the lives of families and children so that the outcomes are transformational, and the promise of truth and reconciliation is fulfilled in real time, in real ways.

I admit it. Any government that does not admit to struggling with this issue is not being honest. We are struggling with it. It is as if we have been placed into a boat that is leaking, and we start bailing, and we start crossing the river thinking that we can get there if we bail quickly enough. The reality is that repairing the boat before we cross the river, and carrying the bailer, is perhaps the best way to go. However, some, in a hurry, want to go while the boat is still leaking. The fear some might have is that the boat will not cross that river.

I think we heard, eloquently, from the previous speaker that failing to cross that river puts real people, children in particular, in jeopardy. That would weigh on everyone's conscience. If we put the \$155 million on the table tomorrow and it did not change lives, where would we be? What accusations of failure would come our way? We grapple with that.

It is a fair point for the opposition to push us. We as a government have a responsibility to respond, and we are. Part of that response is the budget that was brought down. We have listened to the criticism that the budget is back-end loaded.

• (1710)

We know that our first nations communities, whether they are on or off reserve, in our major cities, or in our biggest provinces, or in our smallest communities, it is one of the fastest growing demographics in the country. The reason it is growing is because there are more children this year than last, and there will be more next year.

If the budget did not grow toward the fifth year of the announcement, we would be locking in spending as the number of children and the needs grew. How is that responsible? Therefore, to be criticized for foresight and to invest downstream when we know the waters downstream are going to get choppy, it should not be a criticism of the government; it is something for which we should be praised.

Private Members' Business

We were told that the 2% cap on the increase of transfers was wrong. That was why we removed it this year. It is gone, and the investments are beginning to grow. However, the significant challenge we are dealing with, and it is the question I asked of members opposite as they made their presentations, is when we say \$155 million, how do we operationalize that, because it matters. We can announce a spending envelope, but if there is no mechanism to transport it to communities, it does not show up in the communities. We have to sit down with leadership from the Assembly of First Nations, and from other organizations, and figure out how it arrives as we improve the funding envelope. That is the issue we are struggling with, and that is the issue that is slowing down the process, unacceptably to some, of getting those dollars delivered.

I assure the House that the department, the minister, our government, every member on this side is committed to delivering those dollars in bigger numbers, as quickly as possible, into permanent changes that improve the lives of individuals.

What are we doing? There are investments right across the board in terms of our relationship and our treaty obligations with different nations, different communities, and different individuals. Also, in this calendar year, we received instruction from the Supreme Court about non-status Indians and our responsibility to the Métis nation. As we grapple with the changing environment in which we operate, we have to grapple with budget numbers that must change accordingly.

Have we stepped up on Jordan's principle? Yes. Have we invested more? Yes. Have we put more dollars into education, housing, social services and into our relationships? Absolutely. Has it all been solved in one day? Absolutely not.

What I have asked the members opposite and what I want them to answer is how this \$155 million works. When we read the reports, and comments from the person they claim has said \$155 million is the magic number, she has also said \$200 million is the right number. Which is it, and why \$155 million? It is the precision part of the motion that is causing us concern and stopping us from supporting it. Aside from that, we support the principle and the intent, and, quite frankly, the honour in which it is presented.

The party opposite is asking the right questions and moving, absolutely, the right motions. What we are trying to figure out is what it means for us as a government to have to administer and deliver this money, how we operationalize the instructions the members are trying to give us. On that point, we disagree. On that point, we need clarity. As a government, as a country in a nation-to-nation relationship, we have learned that if we do not move in agreement with first nations communities, it quite often causes much damage, even though the intent is good.

I will continue my remarks later.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: This being an opposition day, there will not be any further debate on the particular question.

It being 5:15 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, November 1, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if you were to canvas the House, I suspect you would find consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m. so we can start private members' hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

NATIONAL SEAL PRODUCTS DAY ACT

The House resumed from October 3 consideration of the motion that Bill S-208, An Act respecting National Seal Products Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up debate on the question, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader had seven minutes remaining in his time for his remarks, and so we will go to him now.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be fairly brief in my comments, because I know that this is a very important issue for a number of my colleagues, particularly those from the Atlantic region. However, rest assured that Canadians as a whole understand and appreciate the significance of who we are as a nation and how important seal products are.

From my perspective, I applaud the sponsor who has brought this bill into the House today, because I know how genuine he is on such an important issue. This is a very important issue, and as I suggested, it is a part of our Canadian heritage.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise and speak to the bill.

As the chair of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus, I first want to pay tribute to my colleagues, the member for Cariboo—Prince George, who has spoken eloquently about this, and of course, my colleague from Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa. I know that my colleague from North Okanagan—Shuswap is about to follow up on this, and we will hear some very enlightened comments, I am sure.

This is an issue that transcends political party boundaries in the House. Therefore, members will see that my remarks will not be partisan, as some remarks can be in this place.

I want to talk about how important this issue is from the perspective of an Albertan.

Private Members' Business

Why would an Alberta MP want to speak to a bill that deals with national seal products? It is from my perspective of growing up on a farm in rural Alberta. I grew up on a Simmental cow-calf operation. We had milk cows, chickens, and hogs from farrow to finish, in a mixed farming environment. The connection I had with the farm, with the outdoor and rural way of life, led me to my passion, which is hunting and fishing. I love it.

I would ask for a show of hands, but I think it would be completely inappropriate. However, I think most members in the House, especially those from rural areas, love hunting and fishing.

What does that have to do with seal products? It is all about efforts, and there are efforts afoot all around the globe from anti-animal abuse activists who are constantly trying to shut down our rural and outdoor way of life. That is fine. In democracies around the world, everybody has the right to their opinion, the right to express those opinions.

However, I would be horrified if I lost the ability some day to ethically hunt for the food I want to provide my family with, or go fishing and spend time with my son, family members, and friends. We go fly fishing on the North Ram River or catch some beautiful brook trout in Gap Lake. I know that the same thing would be felt in all communities, and the pressure is there for all the coastal communities in our magnificent country to shut down the lawful seal harvest.

I will also come at this from a different angle. It was my privilege, because of my passion, that the good people of Canada paid for 70% of my post-secondary education. I was able to get into the University of Alberta and graduate with a zoology degree in fisheries and aquatic sciences. I furthered my passion by working for Alberta Fish and Wildlife on walleye experiments. I worked as a fishing guide in the north, and I was able to pursue that career. Therefore, I want to let people know how important wildlife management techniques are, from an aspect of governance and management, and one of the most effective wildlife management techniques that any government has is the issuance of hunting licences and hunting permits.

Imagine a situation where we have too much or too little of something. We can simply change the rules a little so that we could allow more wildlife, or more of something, to flourish in a particular area; and where we have a little too much of something, we can sell licences, tags, and permits to people. Not only does this generate a source of revenue for governments to be able to fund all kinds of various services and programs, and most notably these things go back into wildlife conservation efforts, but it also allows the government the ability to get rid of or to manage a problem when it has too much of something.

Most Canadians would be shocked to know—and I do not think that the average Canadian actually does know—that back before the moratorium on the cod fishery on the east coast, there were not nearly as many seals as there are today. There were slightly over one million seals. I spent a number of years on the fisheries committee, natural resources committee, and the environment committee in my 10 years as a parliamentarian. Members can correct me if I am wrong, but today I think we have in the order of six or seven times as many seals on the Atlantic coast of Canada.

● (1720)

At the same time, the cod moratorium in the early 1990s was very controversial and it very much impacted the industry and the way of life because of the inappropriate, some would say, mismanagement of the cod fishery. That stock has had a moratorium on it ever since. I am a fisheries biologist by training. That fishery should have recovered by now, and I know that in some places it actually has, but in the vast majority of areas, it has not.

This has cost so many people on the coast their way of life. I would not want that on anybody. I do not want that on the farmers I represent in central Alberta. I certainly do not want foolish policies affecting the way of life of my energy resource workers in central Alberta. I do not want this to affect the way of life of the people who live in our coastal communities. It is vitally important. This perspective is where I am coming from.

I applaud my colleague and admire his courage in bringing this bill forward, because bringing forward a piece of legislation that deals with this issue is often very divisive. It brings out emotions in people. It defies sometimes even logic when people use arguments one way or the other.

The bill focuses primarily on the traditional culture and heritage of Canada's indigenous peoples in coastal communities respecting the use of ocean resources. Why on earth would we not do that? Why on earth would we not promote seal products here in Canada. Why on earth would we not defend the people who earn a livelihood?

In some communities, the ability to harvest seals might only grant that family an extra \$7,000 to \$10,000 a year for the seal harvest, but if that family only has a household income of \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year, we are talking about a significant portion of their earnings. Some people live on those earnings. We should not even have to be defending this; we should be promoting this. The responsible harvest and use of these natural resources in a sustainable and ethical way is something we should be applauding, not admonishing.

We have heard report after report at the fisheries committee, the member who is the sponsor of this piece of legislation and I, saying how much has changed in the practice of seal harvesting over the years and how much more ethically and responsibly done it is today. However, in a world of social media and a world of celebrities, foie-gras-eating celebrities, in some cases, yacht-owning celebrities, in some cases, who take up charges that seem completely hypocritical, what do they say? We have blue sky, white ice, and of course, a harvest going on.

The reality is that it is completely ethical and sustainable to do so, and we should be not only applauding the people who do it but encouraging them and promoting them.

It makes complete sense from a wildlife management perspective. All parties in this House, when they are in government, have a great record of defending it, promoting it, and defending these interests at the European level, at the World Trade Organization, and so on. I think this piece of legislation, if passed, just puts one more feather in our cap as a nation as we promote this.

Private Members' Business

The bill also builds on the importance of ecological sustainability, through practices like the seal harvest, that help maintain healthy wildlife populations. I have already talked about that. One of my favourite events here on the Hill is Seal Day on the Hill. To have an actual day enshrined, not in a legislative way where we have a legal holiday but just as a day that recognizes the importance of this small but vibrant and necessary industry, is absolutely wonderful.

If we go to these dinners we see amazing products made out of sealskin. We have natural health products with seal oil and omega-3, amazing crafts that are made primarily by first nations and Inuit people. We have beautiful coats and beautiful mitts and boots. They are very beautiful, top-quality products. These products have a demand. There are people who are willing to buy these, and it makes complete sense that we would allow this to happen, and not only allow it to happen but encourage it to happen.

I can only say thanks to my colleague for sponsoring the bill and bringing it forward in the House of Commons. I want to thank all of my colleagues in the House of Commons who stand up against things like animal rights legislation posing as legislation dealing with animal welfare, as we saw with Bill C-246, legislation that would have actually been harmful to these efforts.

• (1725)

I want to thank all of the folks who work in this particular industry and risk their lives sometimes. Seal harvesting is one of the more difficult occupations one can have, but is done in a very safe and responsible manner. I wish them good health and safety as they continue with this.

I encourage all of my colleagues in the House of Commons to support this common-sense piece of legislation.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying that I will be supporting the bill, as I support rural communities across this country. I also support the long history of well-managed traditional wildlife harvest that has been the lifeblood of many communities for centuries and even millennia.

I know that the seal hunt is controversial and that support for it varies widely in different parts of Canada and different parts of the world. I know this. I was born and raised in British Columbia, where there was considerable opposition to the Atlantic coast seal hunt, especially 30 or more years ago when whitecoats were still being harvested.

I lived in Newfoundland for a few years during that time and witnessed first-hand the hard feelings between Newfoundlanders and animal rights activists from away, but I also witnessed the excitement in the spring when the first boats returned from the front and seal flippers appeared in local grocery stores. Yes, I have eaten flipper pie. I also spent a summer in the northern Yukon in the early 1980s and witnessed traditional seal hunting while on Herschel Island with an Inuvialuit family.

While I was born in British Columbia, I have to mention that I have a long family history with the seal hunt. My great-great-great-great-grandfather Azariah Munden came to Brigus, Newfoundland, in 1759 and by 1768, he was a sealing captain out of that beautiful port. In 1798, I know his crew took 10,000 seals.

In 1819, his son, Captain William Munden, built the *Four Brothers*, the first Newfoundland-made sealing schooner weighing over 100 tons. By then, Brigus was one of the main centres of the seal fishery in Newfoundland and the Mundens and other Brigus masters were world famous for their exploits on the icy seas, including the Bartletts, who captained the ships that took Admiral Peary to the Arctic and eventually the North Pole.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Newfoundland seal fishery harvested between 400,000 and 500,000 seals per year and was a critical part of the annual wages for many men on the island. Today, the fishery is rather different, and not just because the age of sail gave way to steam and then to diesel. There are six species of seals in Atlantic Canada, but only three or four are hunted regularly. Ringed and bearded seals are hunted in the Arctic, primarily for subsistence purposes. A few grey seals are taken on the Atlantic coast.

However, it is the harp seal has always been the main focus of the hunt and is the most abundant marine mammal in the North Atlantic, probably one of the most abundant marine mammals in the world. They are hunted in Atlantic Canada, the Canadian Arctic, and Greenland. The harp seal population right now is around eight million individuals. I hear 7.4 million from some seal experts. I have heard as much as nine million, but that population has been more or less stable for the past decade and more than triple what it was back in the 1970s.

The harp seal hunt is one of the best-managed harvests of wildlife in the world. For one thing, it is relatively easy to count these animals, as the adult females haul out on the ice to give birth to their young in the spring. I have spent my life counting all sorts of animals and can only dream of such an easy census opportunity. I know there are a couple of fisheries biologists in the House today, who can appreciate trying to count fish underwater. These are dark animals hauled out on ice. One could fly over them and count the dots. The population estimates have a good level of confidence.

About 65,000 seals were harvested last year in the Atlantic hunt, well below the quota set by DFO at 400,000 animals per year. This quota is somewhat above the number that would be set for a precautionary approach, but that would only be used if there were some level of concern about the population trend, and there clearly is not. This management policy is considered one of the best in the world and has been copied by other sealing countries, such as Norway.

I would like to finish by commenting on another topic that often comes up in conversations around the seal fishery and seal populations, and that is the effect that seal predation might have on fish populations, particularly the populations of the endangered northern cod and Atlantic salmon.

Private Members' Business

●(1730)

Both grey seals and harp seals are mentioned in this regard, since their populations have risen as those fish stocks have declined. I know there was an annual cull of grey seals based on this belief until 1990 in an attempt to improve the recovery of cod populations.

However, without going into details here, I would just say that culling one species of animal to improve the numbers of another species, when it has been our actions that created the problem in the first place, is problematic both in terms of biology and logistics. Therefore, I just wanted to say that I would be hesitant to support a seal cull as an effort to improve fish populations, but I do support the commercial harvest of seals on the Atlantic coast and in the Arctic, which in modern times is both well managed and humane.

I support this bill to showcase seal products as I support the rural communities that depend on the traditional seal fishery as a source of income each and every year.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to this bill. Those members in the House who know me know my passion for the sealing industry and my support for Inuit across Canada who depend so heavily upon the sealing industry, as do the people in the my riding and those across Atlantic Canada and in Quebec.

The bill, an act respecting national seal products day, was brought forward by Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, a Liberal senator who has since retired from the Senate. It has now made its way to the House of Commons, championed by my colleague the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, another individual who we know is a very passionate supporter of the sealing industry in Canada.

The bill would designate May 20 of each year as national seal products day throughout Canada. National seal products day would not be a legal holiday, however, it would be an opportunity for us to reflect upon the seal, the cultural use of the seal, the sustainability of the seal in our lives, and how it maintains its strength for Canadians as a source of food, as a source for crafts, as a source of economic sustainability in many regions across the country.

It is important that we recognize and honour this occasion. In fact, on several occasions, I have had the opportunity to host seal day on the Hill. This past year, I hosted seal day for my colleagues, the members of Parliament, but also for others who were supporters of the seal industry across the country. It was an opportunity for advocates and promoters, for artists and crafters, for Inuit and others, to talk about this industry and how it sustained them as individuals and also their communities. It is important we continue to do that.

Those members who know me know I am strong promoter of the seal industry. I wear seal nearly every day, in one way, shape, or form.

I grew up in a small Inuit community in the north. My father was a hunter and a fisherman. Seal was such a large part of the diet of our family. It was our main source of protein as we grew up, but it brought so much more value besides food sustainability.

The seal itself became one of the main products that was used in making clothing, in making things that we would need for use outdoors or indoors every day. To this day, my mother is still a crafter of seal products. She makes beautiful designs of product. We do not waste anything. We have full utilization of seal.

I do not know if I have ever seen a more sustainable harvest in my entire life as exists in the sealing industry. Back 30 or 40 years ago, there was exploitation of the industry by those who were non-supporters, whose only goal was to set out to sabotage the lifeblood and lifestyle of the Inuit and northerners. They were successful, which was unfortunate.

However, as Canadians, we are also resilient and those of us who depend upon this resource to sustain our families continue to fight back.

I watched many times, as a young girl, as my father, my uncles, and my brothers all fought those great protestors who thought they were barbarians, that they were less than everyone else in the country because they were trying to provide for their family in a very sustainable way.

The sealing industry is one of the most humane industries in Canada today. Everything about the seal is humane: the way that it is harvested, the way that it is cured, the way that it is utilized. There is no waste.

●(1735)

In fact, as my colleague spoke to earlier, it has probably become one of the greatest impediments to fish stock rebuilding in Canada, of all the arguments one could make. As we know, we have an overpopulation of seal because of those protesters, because of the way they have tried to erode the lifestyle of Canadians who depend upon this sustainable animal. Our ecosystem is in complete imbalance, an imbalance that has affected the livelihood of other Canadians, especially in Atlantic Canada, and Newfoundland and Labrador in particular.

The imbalance in the ecosystem is a tremendous impediment to the rebuilding of our cod stocks. Indeed, I live in a region where I watch seals go in the rivers and fish for salmon, something we would never have heard of 20 years ago. That is because they are starving, because their population is so large. They have nothing in the ocean left to eat. We have allowed the ecosystem in the ocean to become imbalanced, and that is affecting the rest of the food supply and the fish we depend upon.

Is that wise? Of course it is not wise, but that imbalance was created by people who did not understand the importance of the seal industry to the people who utilize it. When we fish from the ocean or harvest from the land, we do so leaving it in a sustainable way. We do not waste; we utilize. We do not do it for fun; we do it because we need to, and as a cultural part of our lives.

Private Members' Business

The Magdalen Islands, Bona Vista, St. Anthony, Nain, Kuujuaq, these are all places around Canada where both Inuit and non-Inuit have used the seal all their lives to sustain their families. It is such an important part of our culture. It is unfortunate that we have seen the seal ban by the European Union, but I want to say that as devastating as impact has been on indigenous and coastal communities that depend on the seal harvest, we have been working hard to find a way to get our products back into the EU.

I want to recognize and commend the Inuit artists and the Inuit Art Council for the work they have done in building that relationship with the Europeans. I want to commend them for the show they did on indigenous art and seal products in the European Union just recently. They have made some progress and now all seal products from Nunavut will have access to the European market. We are now also working with the Government of the Northwest Territories to ensure that it too will have that access.

I wanted to point that out, because when most people hear about the seal industry, they hear it from well-funded protest groups that have their own ideology about how the ecosystem and society should work. Their ideology is not based upon the cultural values of people who live in Canada. We are a country where people respect each other. We respect the cultures of each other. In our culture, seal is a very important part. It is a part that not only feeds our body and nourishes us, but it is also the part that sustains us economically, and has for a long time. To be able to raise the profile of that is important.

I remember doing about five different shows promoting the seal industry in Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. We promoted the seal products of Inuit people and talked about the seal industry and how it works. Many people wanted to know more about what was happening.

I will be supporting the motion. I think it is a good motion and I would ask my colleagues to recognize the cultural importance of seal and to mark this occasion with my constituents and all Inuit and others in Canada.

• (1740)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill S-208, An Act respecting National Seal Products Day.

This bill is important in its purpose, in affirming the traditions and the heritage of peoples, especially our first nations peoples who inhabit Canadian coastal communities and seek to preserve a way of life and identity. If we examine the fabric of the identity of these people, we will find, interwoven in that fabric, the hard work and enterprising spirit, and many threads of tradition and culture that bring colour and distinction to their identity, and ours too as Canadians.

The bill affords the houses of this Parliament an opportunity to issue respect and stand with our fellow Canadians, the women and men in coastal communities, members of first nations determined to preserve their traditional way of life, to stand with Canadians with pride in the face of those who oppose the utility of the seal.

We need to stand up against those who would deny our fellow Canadians their way of life, those who would deny our fellow

Canadians their cultural traditions, and those who would deny our fellow Canadians their identity.

As such, I stand in my place in the House today in support of not only this bill, but of our fellow Canadians who depend on seals the same way others depend on salmon or wheat or vegetables to pay their bills, the same way others depend on trees to feed their families, and the same way many other Canadians rely on our sustainable and natural resources to maintain their ways of life.

Our fellow Canadians deserve our support, and I sincerely hope our Parliament possesses the fortitude to afford this support. Now, more than ever, we must demonstrate solidarity with our fellow Canadians who seek to recover from the ill-conceived European Union ban of seal products in 2009. The EU ban was not based on science and it was not based on principles of sustainability. The EU ban was the result of a high-profile lobby campaign, fuelled by celebrities who took a few hours away from their lavish lives to denigrate and prejudice the lives of our fellow Canadians.

Sadly, their campaign was fed by biased information based on emotion, not science. The lobby campaign succeeded in undermining a sustainable industry based on seal hunts that were an important part of Canada's management of fisheries and oceans. What the EU did not see, through the smoke and mirrors of the celebrity campaigns, was that the Royal Commission of 1986 brought Canada's seal hunt into the 21st century.

The Royal Commission provided a foundation to ensure Canada's seal hunt was sustainable, sustainable for our seal population and sustainable for the complex ecosystems they inhabited. The Royal Commission also precipitated a modernizing of regulations to ensure the hunt would be carried out humanely.

Unfortunately, the EU has not only injured economies in our coastal and first nations communities, the EU's infantile ban has also harmed our oceans. Over time, we have learned that harvesting or not harvesting one species has impacts on other species and indeed the entire ecosystem in which we exist.

One might ask what an MP from the interior of British Columbia would know about seals or seal products. Well, in my former roles dealing with fish and wildlife management, and now as deputy critic for Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard, I speak with an understanding of how important it is to manage on an ecosystem basis, managing all species holistically, not just on a species-by-species approach.

In my home province of British Columbia, I have been witness to the reluctance to manage predator species and the devastating impacts this reluctance has had on prey and other species. This reluctance to manage predator species was born from similar campaigns based on emotion and vacant of scientific reason. Much like the campaign that led to the EU ban, these campaigns were supported by foreign funds and blatantly ignored the traditions, cultures and ways of life of our fellow Canadians.

Private Members' Business

●(1745)

I have also had the honour of travelling to Atlantic Canada for numerous meetings over the past few months, where I connected with many Atlantic Canadians who depend on the ocean for subsistence. The ocean and its bounty are their livelihood.

A fisherman friend from Newfoundland recently relayed to me that there was a time when the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador relied completely on the bounty of the sea, that the island of Newfoundland was founded on fishing and sealing, industries that supported the very survival of the inhabitants of Newfoundland. This was their way of life for hundreds of years, solidifying the importance of sealing in Canada's history as a heritage activity.

It has been over 24 years since the cod moratorium was announced, an announcement that precipitated the largest layoffs in Canada's history.

This fisherman also told me that the sealing industry is without a doubt a crucial element in helping the cod stocks of the northwest Atlantic Ocean recover from the devastating collapse in the 20th century. To ensure that the fisheries in Atlantic Canada will have a future, we need to protect them from an ever-increasing seal population, which is severely limiting their recovery. Population control is an essential tool that is needed to ensure that a balanced ecosystem can exist.

Hunters and fishers are able to harvest seals humanely, and they ought to be able to do that and be supported in this, as it is a means for them to provide for themselves and for others. By passing this bill, we would be helping to restore the way of life that existed in Newfoundland and other coastal communities that has been so drastically impacted.

We would also be building a stronger case for the EU to overturn its ban. By undercutting Canada's seal hunt, the EU ban has undercut an industry that has had an important role in maintaining a delicate balance in our ocean ecosystem.

A reduction in the number of seals being harvested has wreaked havoc on our fisheries. Canada's Atlantic salmon fishery continues to struggle, and we know that predation and a booming seal population is a factor. The same can be said for Canada's northern cod fishery and the snow crab fishery in Atlantic Canada, and the list goes on.

The EU ban has hurt the economies of our coastal and first nations communities, especially in our northern communities. In fact, I recently learned of a correlation between the imposition of the EU ban on seal products and an increase in the suicide rate in Canada's northern communities.

The EU ban has undermined a legitimate industry that was part of a broader system of maintaining a sustainable balance in the ocean food chains and ecosystems. Enough is enough. The European Union may close its market to our seal products and undermine our system, but the European Union and its chaos cannot and will not impinge on the pride and dignity of our fellow Canadians.

I applaud the sponsor of this bill for the fortitude to take on a challenging issue and bring it to the forefront, but I would be remiss if I did not mention a previous and similar bill that was introduced and passed in the previous Parliament. Bill C-501, passed in 2014,

recognized National Hunting, Trapping and Fishing Heritage Day. We now have one day of the year that officially recognizes a fundamental part of our Canadian heritage that not only helped build this great nation but continues to provide food and sustenance for people across this land.

Bills S-208 and C-501 have very much in common. Both bills recognize the importance of our Canadian heritage, history, and way of life. Both bills seek respect for those people who make their living from our renewable and sustainable resources of fish, wildlife, and marine species.

If we fail to recognize and defend that which has made us Canadian, we open the door to exterior forces that would erode our identity, forces and voices that would detach Canadians from our heritage, our land, and our oceans and sever our connection to the earth.

The human race evolved by learning how to harvest and utilize the natural resources around us. In doing so, we are now learning that we must manage those natural resources around us in a way that finds balance. The people, including the first nations, who live on the front line of harvesting and who depend on natural resources such as seals understand this balance.

●(1755)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to defend Senate Bill S-208, an act respecting national seal products day.

The issues in the industry have been well-explained by the many speakers we have heard, so I will not repeat what they have said. I agree with them. Their speeches were very good.

I seconded this bill sponsored by my friend, colleague, and mentor, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame. When he asked me if I would do it, there was no hesitation on my part, for while the seal population in the Laurentians is decidedly low, it is an important issue close to my heart, one I have been passionate about going all the way back to high school. There is a back story to this that members probably will not hear very often.

I grew up in a political but not partisan family, political in the sense of getting involved in the community, in issues, in nation-building in our own little corner of the nation. For reasons of opportunity not germane to this debate, I attended high school at a boarding school in Massachusetts. I received the maximum financial assistance from the school available to foreign students. There, at an institution founded in the latter half of the 19th century, called Northfield Mount Hermon School, I met students from dozens of countries, and as a teenager learned how to swear in many languages. Never did I swear so loudly as I did after the school invited a guest speaker on an issue that to that point I knew nothing about and had not even heard of. Therefore, when Captain Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society spoke to the entire assembled student body about the need to destroy the sealing industry in Canada, and how he had sunk two ships through his activities, more than the Canadian navy itself had sunk since the Second World War, he said at the time, I twigged to its being a fundamental injustice.

Private Members' Business

As a 15-year old from rather far inland in rural Quebec, I did not yet know what the seal hunt was. Google did not yet exist, websites were often turned off at the end of the business day, Wikipedia was five years away, people still used the gopher protocol and had RFC 742, or finger, profiles, and so information had to be gleaned in more traditional ways. However, my instinct in listening to this energetic and very well-received speech, according to my fellow students, was that it did not add up. The seal hunt no doubt was an important part of Canadian culture in a part of my country I knew nothing about. It felt like an attack not only on a people or an industry but on my country. I took it as an attack on Canada itself.

I was never shy in school to identify myself as Canadian. Of over 1,100 students from around 75 countries, there were never more than about a dozen of us from here. Most of my classmates referred to me by the nickname they gave me, “Canada”, and I can say that upon returning to Canada, it was a bit of a disappointment to lose that nickname, though in a similar way, in the years I lived in Ontario, I was just as proud to identify myself as a Quebecker, which I consider to be an integral part of my identity and who I am.

At NMH, we were early adopters of technology. Jonas Reed Klein had graduated in the class of 1993, two years before my arrival. A very promising technologist, he went on to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that autumn, but was tragically killed in an unusual small plane crash in November of that year, the plane being knocked out of the sky in a collision with a skydiver. I never met Jonas, but my brother Jonah, who attended NMH before me, did know him, and one of my most important mentors in technology, my classmate Seth Schoen, who is now at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, met him, learned from him, and passed on a lot of that knowledge and his passion. As a result of Jonas' very promising career, and strong and, by all accounts, contagious interest in technology, his family set up a memorial fund at my school to promote the use of and education about technology. Had that series of events not happened, I would not be standing in the House today.

The technology fund created two things: one was the technology package needed to create a campus club called GEECS, a recursive acronym for Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, which had a 386 running Slackware Linux on a 1.2 kernel, where I got my first Linux experience, which directly resulted in my first career as a technology journalist and news editor at linux.com, under the mentorship of Robin Miller, known in the technology world simply as Roblimo, and made me probably one of the few people ever to use Lynx, the text-mode web browser, professionally. The other was a system years ahead of its time called SWIS, the School-Wide Information System, based on the first-class collaboration suite. By the end of my ninth grade in 1995, every student in the school had an email address, which we could use on the Mac LC 475s and Mac LC 520s in the Cutler computer lab. Somewhere between a BBS and a social network, the system allowed students and faculty to interact electronically with message groups on arbitrary topics in what was then a very novel way.

One of these groups was on food. Frequently, vegan advocates would argue for veganism, something they are well-known to do. Their argument, which was not unfair, was that people should not eat meat without knowing where it came from, that it was not justifiable to eat meat if one was not part of the process of how that meat ended

up on one's plate. Being a life-long homesteader, my parents Joe and Sheila—any nearby Australians may want to take note of their names—were among the runners up for *Mother Earth News'* Homesteaders of the Year back in 2012, so I knew a thing or two about where meat came from.

• (1800)

My whole life, we have raised our own meat, vegetables, eggs, and so forth. Today, in our multi-generational household, we produce around 80% of the food we eat, when we are not here in Ottawa, of course.

My argument, therefore, back to these vegan activists was always, “Here's my connection to meat”, and then I would go into detail, “Here's how to raise a chicken. Here's how to slaughter a chicken. Here's how to clean a chicken. Here's how to store a chicken and here's how to prepare a chicken.” Of course, this put the vegan activists in a really awkward spot. The general consensus and response from them on the SWIS message board was, “Nobody should eat meat, except David.”

There is the trouble. When a vegan, an activist, or someone who is against the seal hunt but will happily go eat a hamburger tells me, or you, Madam Speaker, or any of our colleagues here, or our families, or our fellow citizens, what we can and cannot eat, what we can and cannot produce, and what we should or should not do, they are making assumptions about who we are, what our experiences are, and what our realities are.

In my years since, it has been important to me to learn about other people's experiences and realities, to become that much more worldly, and among many other things, to understand what the seal hunt actually is, beyond my baseline high school instincts. I would invite others to do the same.

When people all over the world tell our communities, who for over millennia have become very much part of the ecosystem in our coastal regions, where managing the seal population does not only serve to feed a population directly but also ensures fish stocks can survive the voracious appetites of our fellow predators, that this particular hunt is wrong and must result in a social and economic stigma that has nothing to do with reality, I believe it is important that we use our technology to post on our worldwide information-sharing systems what our reality actually is.

Private Members' Business

The stigma has made it so that buying seal meat in a grocery store, or through a fishmonger, which should be possible, is not possible. I believe it is incumbent on people like us, parliamentarians, in our position of protecting the interests of our society and of our future, to respond in kind, to say, no, we do not accept that social and economic stigma based on no facts whatsoever but only on a perception and on a quick political whim, where there is no real need to worry about the realities over there in Canada. No, we do not buy the argument that sinking warships in the Canadian navy as a protest against the livelihoods of our people is productive, fair, or justified. We will not put up with these attacks on a Canadian way of life, which goes back far longer than Canada as we know it.

It is very important for us to pass Bill S-208 and make May 20 national seal products day to make a statement that we defend our people and their way of life, that we defend the livelihood of our people, that we will celebrate our culture, and that we want to see our products succeed.

The bill does not make a holiday. It makes a statement. It is a statement I am proud to make, proud to shout from the rooftops, and one I hope my colleagues will be proud to make as well.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I first want to thank my former employee and colleague. I did not even write the speech for him. With all the technical words in it, I am just not capable of doing it, quite frankly.

I want to thank him for that, because he illustrates a very important point. It is not just a holiday; it is a statement. That is absolutely correct. Here is someone who has no connection to any of the communities that have been mentioned, whether they are in the north, on the coast of British Columbia, or in Atlantic Canada, and he managed to make a connection as a Canadian, to all Canadians, over 30 million of us, to look at seal products day as a necessary thing.

I also want to thank my other colleagues, and I would like to mention some of them. Someone who did not get a chance to speak was the member for Nunavut, but I want to thank him. He has supplied many of the seal ties we see here today. He has truly been an advocate. As a matter of fact, when he greeted the President of the United States, he was wearing a seal tie. I think that is probably the first time that has ever happened with an American president, and hopefully not the last.

I want to thank the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa very much, because he brought forward the argument of wildlife management. I want to share a story with him. One of my predecessors, the member of Parliament for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception, was Captain Morrissey Johnson. He captained a boat himself and then became a politician. He was on *Front Page Challenge*, a television show on CBC, as a guest about the seal hunt. He was asked what made him so convinced that seals were eating fish. His response was that they were in the ocean and they were certainly not eating turnips, which was a very illustrative point. I thought it was pretty good. I want to thank the member for that, and his vast experience with wildlife management certainly was educational.

I would like to thank the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, who pointed out that seals provide extra money for people with low

incomes. That is very true. He compared it to when Europeans say they do not like the seal hunt and the cruelty it represents, and then eat foie gras. I do not have to illustrate how foie gras is made. I probably should not or we would not eat supper, but I do support that industry as well.

I want to thank the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay. He talked about the coast-to-coast connection, his family being from Brigus, Newfoundland, sealers themselves, and then on the west coast with the Inuvialuit.

I want to thank my colleague from Labrador. She hosts seal day here. She has been an extremely passionate advocate for it, and I thank her greatly for all she has done. She is certainly a champion for this, more so than I am, quite frankly.

I also want to thank the member for North Okanagan—Shuswap for his comments. He talked about the EU ban and how unjust and unfair it is, which goes back to the point that was made by my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle about the fact that there are people who look at this as being extremely cruel, but have no problem wearing or eating other animal products without any idea where they come from, how they are slaughtered, or how they are raised.

Of course, I also want to thank my colleagues who questioned me during my first speech. I want to thank them for that, but again I remind them that this day, as my colleague pointed out, is not just a day of celebration. It is a strong statement for our communities. There are exemptions in place in places like the European Union for cultural reasons—aboriginal, first nations, Inuit—but quite frankly, they still do not understand how this works because they have to sell this commercially in order to make things viable, as well as the Atlantic communities.

All that being said, I want to thank all of my colleagues in the House for allowing me to bring this forward. I want to thank Céline Hervieux-Payette, a former senator, for being the genesis of this particular bill. It was my honour to bring it forward. I also want to thank the former member for Yukon, who also made a go at this and it did not quite work. However, it is now in the House for a vote. Let us hope this happens.

I will stand here to vote for Bill S-208 in the same way and in the same spirit that I voted for Bill C-501, and that is to protect our culture tied to wildlife, how we manage it, and how we champion it as Canadians.

• (1805)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Adjournment Proceedings

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 2, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, tonight I stand with the Nuu-chah-nulth people to call on the Government of Canada to honour its commitment to reconciliation with first nations and to uphold the Supreme Court of Canada's decision.

It has been seven years since the Supreme Court of Canada reaffirmed the Nuu-chah-nulth aboriginal right to catch and sell fish. Even after a Supreme Court of Canada justice had mandated that the government deal fairly and negotiate with the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations on their fishing rights, they still remain without a negotiated agreement, or a reasonable offer from the federal government, to exercise their proven, established, and constitutionally protected rights.

Instead of being on the water fishing, where they belong, the Nuu-chah-nulth are still in court arguing with federal government lawyers, which sounds familiar, who continue to try to minimize their aboriginal fishing rights.

Just last June, in fact, we felt hopeful about meaningful progress when the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard met with the Nuu-chah-nulth chiefs here in Ottawa. Still nothing has changed, and the conflict continues.

At last September's meeting with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, it was made clear by DFO officials that their department had no mandate to implement the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations rights-based fishery.

That is when the Ha'wiih, the hereditary chiefs, dismissed the DFO regional director from their meeting and asked her not to return until Canada develops a meaningful mandate to implement their rights-based fishery.

In an unprecedented move, the Nuu-chah-nulth Ha'wiih, the hereditary chiefs, also told the Prime Minister that he is no longer welcome on their land until this conflict is resolved.

For thousands of years, salmon has been the main food source and sustenance of the Nuu-chah-nulth people. The Nuu-chah-nulth just

want to find their rightful place in a new respectful and trusting relationship with Canada.

Here we have an economic development opportunity that supports self-determination, and finally we have a government that says it is onside and supports indigenous people with action, but instead, this government, like the Harper government, refuses to let them move forward. Indigenous people have repeatedly said, enough already.

As we know, the crown has a constitutional duty to consult and accommodate indigenous people before taking action that may affect claimed or proven aboriginal and treaty rights. This is a recognized legal requirement, pursuant to section 35 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court tells us that the underlying purpose of the duty to consult and accommodate is to advance reconciliation in the relationship between indigenous people and the crown. This duty to consult and accommodate is in line with the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Justice. It seems that all the pieces are in place to move forward with a fair negotiation of Nuu-chah-nulth fishing rights.

Why is the government stalling? Why is Canada's relationship with the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations not moving toward reconciliation? The Nuu-chah-nulth deserve to have answers to these questions, and every time I ask these questions, I do not get the answers. The government lawyers continue to argue in court that Nuu-chah-nulth fishing rights should be minimized. The ministers say one thing and do another.

I have lived in the Nuu-chah-nulth territories for more than two decades, and I have come to know the Nuu-chah-nulth people to be respectful, kind, patient, and more than fair, so I am hoping the government will consider showing that respect back.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans must be given a clear mandate to negotiate fairly. I ask the minister opposite to please explain the government's next action steps to resolve this conflict so the Nuu-chah-nulth can find their rightful place in this new relationship with Canada.

● (1810)

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me first start by thanking the member opposite for his interest in this issue.

[*Translation*]

Establishing a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership is a top priority for our government.

To be clear, the federal government is not opposing the rights of the five Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nations. On the contrary, our government remains committed to the consultation and negotiation process, and accommodating and implementing the rights of the first nations.

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In its decision of November 3, 2009, the Supreme Court of British Columbia found that the five bands on the west coast of Vancouver Island have an aboriginal right to fish for any species of fish within their fishing territories, and to sell that fish. On appeal, the Court of Appeal for British Columbia excluded geoduck from the scope of the aboriginal right.

[English]

The decision also found that the first nations have a right to fish using their preferred means, which the court characterized as community-based, localized fisheries involving wide community participation and using small, low-cost boats. Consultation and negotiation with the five Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations have been ongoing since 2010.

[Translation]

Following the establishment of the right, the parties set up a substantive consultation and negotiation process that was modelled on treaty negotiations with a main table for negotiations and a joint working group for technical discussions to work with the first nations to address outstanding fisheries issues.

• (1815)

[English]

In addition to these main table and technical discussions, DFO senior officials have met regularly with the first nations to help work out the details of accommodating the first nations rights.

[Translation]

The matters that are the subject of consultations are complex. One of the significant challenges for these ongoing negotiations is that there is a different view on the scope of the right, which was described by the court as a right to sell fish into the commercial market place but not on an industrial scale.

Since 2010, significant fishing access has been provided to the first nations. For example, in 2007, the first nations had 23 commercial licences and they now have access to over 126 licences and additional quota. In 2015, to help guide the discussions, DFO developed a negotiating framework to enable DFO and the first nations to further test and evaluate the accommodation of preferred means of fishing through local small boat fishery approaches for chinook salmon and other species of interest to the first nations.

Through these consultations and negotiation processes, we are seeking to continue implementation of the court decision; provide regular communal commercial access for first nations to participate in commercial fisheries; enable fishing by the first nations using preferred means; ensure that after food, social and ceremonial requirements, there is access for the first nations and for regular commercial and recreational sectors in the fishery; and ensure that proper management and control mechanisms are in place to support conservation and compliance for all fisheries.

[English]

Again, these are complicated matters. The consultation and negotiation processes established by DFO and the five first nations have helped develop a common understanding of our respective views and is assisting us in finding mutually agreeable resolutions to outstanding issues.

[Translation]

The government is committed to working with the first nations through the current consultation and negotiation processes to accommodate their rights.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, one thing the government has in common with government lawyers is that it is basically continuing to try to minimize the aboriginal fishing rights of the Nuu-chah-nulth. That is clear in what I just heard today and what we see in the courts.

This is not a nation-to-nation relationship. This is not about consultation and accommodation. Accommodation is coming to the table with a mandate to negotiate something fairly, respectfully, based on principles that will advance each nation to nation so they can thrive. This is the sustenance of these nations.

Will the government issue a clear mandate to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to negotiate fairly with the Nuu-chah-nulth nations so they can implement their rights-based fisheries? I invite the member opposite to explain how the government will move beyond its words and show real actions that back up their commitments to the Nuu-chah-nulth people and indigenous people.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Speaker, as I said before, a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples is a top priority for our government.

[Translation]

Once again, we are not opposing the rights of the five Nuu-Chah-Nulth first nations. Our government takes these rights very seriously and is working with first nations.

[English]

Consultations and negotiations with the five first nations have been ongoing since 2010.

[Translation]

Since then, significant fishing access to the commercial fishery has been provided. The matters that are the subject of consultations are very complex. The processes established have allowed for the essential exchange of views as we continue to work together to find mutually agreeable solutions to address outstanding issues and to implement this right.

[English]

I can assure the member that this government is committed to working with the first nations through the current consultations and negotiation process to accommodate their rights.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, back in June, I asked why the government had not started an open and transparent competition to replace the CF-18 fighter jets. At the time, it appeared to many observers that the government was set to do a sole-source deal to obtain Super Hornets. To give credit where it is due, the government has not yet purchased Super Hornets through a sole-source deal. However, to the government's discredit, it has still not started a transparent process to replace the CF-18s.

One of the key arguments against an open competition is that it would take too long. I want to put it on record that, if the government had started an open competition when I pressed this issue in June, we would now be four months into that process. If we back up a little more, part of the Liberal election platform was an open and transparent competition to replace the CF-18s. If the Liberals had kept that promise upon taking power, we would now have had a year to conduct that proper process. If at some point down the road the government comes out with a sole-source deal to purchase Super Hornets or some other aircraft to replace CF-18s and says there is not enough time to run an open competition, let us remember that the government has already missed so many opportunities to do the proper process.

I am really hoping that the parliamentary secretary across the way is going to update the House on where the government is at on fighter procurement and is going to explain why the government has not yet followed through on its promise for an open competition.

However, since we have such limited information to work with on fighter procurement, I do want to address another troubling trend in military policy, the increased sabre rattling toward Russia.

This summer, the Liberal government thrust Canada into a leading role in a very provocative military deployment to Latvia against Russia. The government made this decision without consulting Parliament. I believe that, for a deployment of this nature, the government should come before the House and make the case to explain what it is doing, why it is doing it, and what the exit strategy may be.

South of the border, we have the likely next president of the United States, Hillary Clinton, promising a no-fly zone in Syria. What that would actually mean, if the United States were to follow through on that promise, would be to shoot down Russian planes over Syria. In short, that would mean war with Russia.

Earlier this month, Russia conducted a civil defence drill with 40 million people. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has its doomsday clock set at three minutes to midnight. I am proud of the role the NDP has played as a voice for nuclear disarmament and peace, but this should not be a partisan issue. Canada as a whole should be working for nuclear disarmament and peace. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has obstructed UN efforts to ban nuclear weapons and continues to take a provocative stand versus Russia.

Our country needs a better defence procurement policy and less military provocation.

● (1820)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, being in this place for a number of years, I have noticed that whenever there is a great success, it is greeted with deafening silence.

Today, we had a great success in the national shipbuilding strategy. The government announced that it had shortened the time process effectively by two years by simply picking a single hull design. It has invited 13 contractors, all the interested contractors, to submit bids, and that will all be done by April. Therefore, we are moving almost at lightening speed, in government terms, to fulfill the crying need of the Canadian Navy.

I take note that the hon. member submitted his question in June. However, he should take note that shortly after the submission of his question, on July 6 to be precise, the government invited all five contractors, in an open and transparent way, to update all their information. All of that information was collated and received on the quality of the various jets that were being considered. This information has been brought forward, collated, and is being prepared for a memorandum to cabinet.

Therefore, in about one year's time, we have gone from what was essentially a chaotic process of procurement for the jets to: (a) having the cabinet make a clear decision as to the kind of jet that is needed to replace the F-18s; (b) inviting all five contractors to submit, in an open and transparent way, what they think they could do to fulfill the requirements as set by cabinet; (c) completing an analysis and collation of the information for the preparation of a memorandum to cabinet so cabinet can make an informed decision on this open and transparent process.

Therefore, quite candidly, we have more than responded to the hon. member's inquiry.

● (1825)

Mr. Erin Weir: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the response from the parliamentary secretary. I noticed he used the adjectives "open and transparent" many times. He said that they were gathering information in an open way, but even the parliamentary secretary has not claimed today that the government has kept its promise to conduct an open and transparent competition to replace the CF-18s. That is certainly what the NDP is pushing for in the House.

I also note there was no response at all to the points I made about the provocation of Russia. I would simply note that U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy was to "...speak softly, and carry a big stick". By contrast, our Prime Minister's foreign policy is to speak inconsistently and carry a selfie stick.

Our country needs better defence procurement and less military provocation.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, I do not know how more open and transparent we can be in trying to invite all five contractors to submit their material, and trying to assemble and collate that in accordance with a statement of requirements as set out by the cabinet. It is pretty open and transparent to my way of thinking.

As to provocation, I am not quite sure who is doing the provoking here. It is not anybody else who invaded Crimea other than Russia. It is not anybody else who is bombing Syria other than Russia. It is not anybody else who is continually encroaching on international air space other than Russia. It is not anybody else who is building military facilities up in the Arctic other than Russia.

We can take the choice to bury our heads in the sand and ignore all of these provocations, but we will have a hard time convincing the Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, and Ukrainians that it is anyone other than Russia that is doing the provocation.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to revisit the important issue of pay equity for Canadian working women.

On May 20, I asked the government when it would be introducing proactive pay equity legislation so that Canadian women could finally get equal pay for work of equal value and make inroads on closing the gender wage gap. The parliamentary secretary replied that she agreed that a wage gap in 2016 is unacceptable. She went on to talk about a few things that might support women's labour market participation and said that she looked forward to reviewing the report from the Special Committee on Pay Equity, but she did not answer my question.

The special committee's report, entitled "It's Time to Act", was tabled on June 9 and just a few weeks ago, on October 7, the government tabled its response to that report. Its answer was "not until 2018". Despite the urgency that the report's title seems to suggest, the minister and the government do not think it is problematic and shameful to ask Canadian women to wait at least another two years for what is their fundamental human right, equal pay for work of equal value.

The Prime Minister calls himself a feminist and he boasts about a gender-balanced cabinet. However, talk is cheap. When it comes to walking the walk, it seems the government is not quite as feminist as it likes to say it is. The so-called gender parity cabinet includes five women, but no men, who are junior ministers. It also joined with the Conservatives to vote down a bill that would have helped level the playing field and remove barriers, systemic barriers, for women candidates. Now, it is shamelessly kicking the can on pay equity.

Waiting another 18 months to even introduce legislation means that the government would be able to conveniently hold pay equity for ransom during the next election. "Look", they could say, "We finally brought in legislation, but in order for us to actually make good on it, you'll have to re-elect us."

This is the height of cynicism. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Status of Women should be ashamed of themselves. Pay equity was declared a fundamental human right in 1977. Today, in 2016, we are still fighting to have our government enshrine this right in legislation.

The pay equity task force conducted consultations and issued a report in 2004 that provided a road map for the government to act. Unfortunately, the Liberal government of the time declined to do so. Ten years of darkness for women's rights followed the fall of that Liberal government. However, the optimism that came with the

Adjournment Proceedings

election one year ago of the current Liberal government seems to have been misplaced when it comes to standing up for women's rights.

The present Liberal government likes to brand itself as feminist, but given the chance to finally correct an injustice to women, it has also declined, or maybe just postponed.

Justice delayed is justice denied. As Barb Byers of the Canadian Labour Congress and Robyn Benson of PSAC, both witnesses who testified at the Special Committee on Pay Equity, said, countless women have died waiting for pay equity. How much longer do Canadian women have to wait? Women who worked at Bell Canada and at Canada Post had to wait decades to receive their fair wages.

Why will the government not do what is clearly right and bring in proactive pay equity legislation now? Why has it, once again, abandoned those women most vulnerable to exploitation? Indigenous women, women who are racialized, and those who work in non-unionized workplaces are disproportionately affected by the gender wage gap.

Why does the government put equity and women's rights in Canada at the very bottom of their "real change" to-do list?

● (1830)

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this adjournment debate on the issue of pay equity. Pay equity is defined as equal pay for work of equal value. It means that jobs are evaluated on their skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions and can be compared for their value in the workplace. The gender wage gap is the broader issue of the difference between the total of what women earn in our country compared to men. The two are linked because addressing pay equity allows us to acknowledge the undervaluing of work traditionally performed by women and consider ways to address it.

Pay equity, however, is only one part of the solution to the gender wage gap. It is a complicated issue with multiple causes and requires a multi-faceted response. No single action by an individual, organization, or government will close the gender wage gap. It is going to take all Canadians working together to do this.

The need for action is clear. According to Statistics Canada, a woman working full time makes 73.5¢ for every dollar a man makes. The good news is that we know women are making incredible strides throughout society and the economy, yet even with this progress, the statistics tell us women are still concentrated in lower-paying sectors such as retail, health care, and social services. Women are also overrepresented in part-time work and are less likely to reach more senior-level positions.

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[*Translation*]

For all these reasons, I was pleased to see that the Government of Canada was acting on the recent report of the Special Committee on Pay Equity.

On October 5, the Minister of Status of Women, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, and the President of the Treasury Board reaffirmed the government's view that equal pay for work of equal value is a human right. Pay equity between men and women and the fair treatment of all workers in the workplace, regardless of gender, are critical for creating growth and a thriving middle class.

Here are the measures that our government plans to adopt. First, the federal government will hold meaningful consultations and conduct a comprehensive study on pay equity. It will then introduce proactive pay equity legislation for federally regulated workplaces before the end of 2018. This legislation will require employers to regularly and proactively examine their compensation plans, identify disparities between men and women, and take steps to eliminate them. The new pay equity regime will be rigorous and sensitive to the needs of all types of federally regulated workplaces, from the public service to small businesses.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson: Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with my hon. colleague that the larger issue of the gender wage gap is complicated and complex, but that is not what I was asking. Today I was asking about pay equity legislation. Once again, we see there are going to be some consultations, they are going to reaffirm, but there will be no action for two years.

The government really has provided no good reason and no real evidence for its two-year timeline. There is no reason. Not one single witness asked for the government to redo the 2004 task force. It was told to us by witness after witness that the report is still relevant

today and it is one of the best pay equity task force reports done in the world. There are no excuses for the government not to move forward. As I said, there was not one single witness who recommended delaying the introduction of pay equity legislation.

I ask the government again, why are you delaying the implementation of the legislation?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member that I am not delaying it. Again, we have to talk in the third person.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Speaker, to answer my colleague's question, this is why we will be introducing proactive pay equity legislation in 2018. We strongly believe in the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and the fair treatment of all workers, regardless of gender.

[*Translation*]

In order to help women access senior management positions, we have implemented a new open, transparent, and merit-based selection process for recruiting excellent female candidates to approximately 4,000 Governor in Council and ministerial appointed positions. This new approach will help ensure that commissions, boards, crown corporations, agencies, and tribunals across the country are more representative of Canada's diversity.

[*English*]

We also believe in making sure that the needs of women and girls are fully understood.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 18:38 p.m.)

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