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(HANSARD)

Friday, February 24, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 24, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*English*]

PRECLEARANCE ACT, 2016

The House resumed from February 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, an act respecting the preclearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in the House to Bill C-23, an act respecting the preclearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States. I also want to thank the member for Beloeil—Chambly for moving the recent amendment that is before us today related to Bill C-23.

I will outline the reasons I support the recent amendment against the background of where we are today. To do that, I must first point out that the conditions present when the bill was drafted and tabled simply are not the same conditions we are seeing today, and frankly, they are unlikely to revert back anytime soon. What are those changing conditions? Let me state the obvious for the government members, as they have chosen, in my view, to stick their heads in the sand and turn a blind eye to what is happening right under their noses.

As the NDP critic for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, I have been compelled on many occasions since the election of President Trump to speak out against the discriminatory immigration and humanitarian policies being enacted by our neighbours south of our border. Unfortunately, despite a welcoming plea to immigrants and refugees by the Prime Minister, the government has failed to match its words with action. Instead, the Prime Minister has chosen to turn a blind eye to the politics of fear and division the Trump administration is fanning against the immigrant and refugee community, most particularly the Muslim community. The government continues to remain silent. Worse, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has gone so far as to suggest that nothing has changed. Anyone can see that plenty has changed since Trump was elected.

Hundreds of refugees have been forced to risk life and limb to cross illegally into Canada. In fact, the number has more than doubled, and in some cases even tripled, since Trump was elected. Since Trump was elected, there has been constant consternation about the situation, not just here in Canada but in the international community as well. One might ask why these refugees would risk their lives and limbs. They are doing it because they are desperate, because for them, the U.S. is no longer a safe haven.

Border communities are struggling to cope. Yesterday the Province of Manitoba announced that it will put resources into housing and resettlement for these asylum seekers. The Province of Manitoba has actually called for a federal, coordinated response, yet the federal government is missing in action.

Canadians are faced with racial profiling at the U.S. border, and the Prime Minister is busy, frankly, sucking up to Trump and will not even bring those cases to the President's attention. Instead, incidents of hate have reared their ugly heads, and we are seeing them in communities across this country.

The Prime Minister will not stand up and call out Trump's politics of fear and division. New executive orders are on their way, and so far, media reports suggest that these new executive orders will be strikingly similar to Trump's failed discriminatory orders. Perhaps the worst is yet to come.

It is with this information in mind that we must be examining Bill C-23, and not based on the situation when the agreement was signed under the Obama presidency. It is imperative that this legislation be examined under this drastic shift in conditions.

Let me say at the outset that while New Democrats will always be in favour of making it easier to access and cross the border, it must be noted that we feel strongly that this must never be done at the expense of Canadians' rights, privacy, and human rights. This is especially the case when those rights are compromised on Canadian soil. Many of my constituents are very concerned about Bill C-23 and are wondering what the implications are in practical terms, especially in the current troubling climate of uncertainty that has been created by the Trump administration.

Let me be clear. Bill C-23 would not address the concerns Canadians have regarding being interrogated, detained, and turned back at the border based on their race, religion, travel history, or birthplace as a result of policies that may contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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In fact, Bill C-23 would increase the powers of U.S. officers on Canadian soil. Let me start with the issue of firearms. If Bill C-23 passes, it would mean that U.S. customs and border protection officers would be authorized to carry firearms in pre-clearance areas in land, rail, and marine stations. In fact, this bill could violate Canadian sovereignty by increasing the powers of American pre-clearance officers on Canadian soil with respect to the carrying of firearms and by not properly defining the criminal liability framework.

What we know is that the way U.S. customs and border protection carries out its national security mandate is very different from that of the Canada Border Services Agency. Many studies have shown that officers are trigger-happy, frankly, and use lethal force much too often. This should be a major concern for Canadians.

However, the authority that would be granted to U.S. customs officers would not stop there. The adoption of Bill C-23 would also mean that strip searches could be conducted by American pre-clearance officers. While U.S. customs officers would have to ensure that a CBSA officer of the same sex as the traveller was present during a strip search, if one was not available or declined to conduct a strip search, a U.S. customs officer would be authorized to do the search. This would be especially problematic during peak hours and the holiday season or when the CBSA was understaffed.

For those from the transgender community, Bill C-23 lacks provisions to protect their rights and freedoms, as the wording of Bill C-23 uses the term “sex” instead of “gender”. What does this mean? It means that those whose biological characteristics do not match their gender identity would be denied access to a pre-clearance officer of the same gender if they were strip-searched.

I will quote from the U.S. customs and border protection website regarding the procedure for searching transgender individuals. It states, “If the individual being searched has undergone the total transformation, the current gender of that person will dictate whether or not a male or female U.S. Customs and Border Protection... Officer performs the search”.

This language is discriminatory, because it ignores the reality of many transgender persons who do not want to, have not, or cannot undergo sex reassignment surgery.

What is more, Bill C-23 would also mean that people could be detained and questioned by U.S. pre-clearance officers on Canadian soil. Under the proposed legislation, travellers would no longer be able to exercise their right to withdraw from questioning. They could be detained and be obliged to answer any questions asked of them by U.S. officers. The act says that a traveller must not be “unreasonably” delayed. However, Bill C-23 does not clearly define what constitutes to “unreasonably delay” a traveller’s withdrawal following a request to leave the pre-clearance area.

The implications of Bill C-23 do not stop there. We have seen that searches of electronic devices and requests to access the digital universe of travellers to the U.S. have been on the rise since the inauguration of Trump. In fact, a recent statement by the Trump administration suggests that an order requiring all travellers to disclose the contents of their electronic devices could be adopted. Bill C-23 would do nothing to ensure that Canadians’ right to privacy

would be protected during searches of electronic devices. While the government will argue that is up to people if they want to provide their devices to U.S. customs officers, the fact is that many travellers would be intimidated by them and would find it difficult to refuse such a request.

● (1010)

In addition, Bill C-23 would also mean that CBSA officers at a U.S. airport could prevent some Canadian permanent residents from boarding their flights if the officer somehow suspected that travellers had breached their permanent residency requirements. The bill also means, for refugees, that they could not make a claim for refugee status in the Canadian pre-clearance perimeter in the U.S.

To top it all off, Canadian officers would not be bound by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms when they were in positions of authority outside Canadian borders. This would mean that Canada Border Services Agency officers posted to pre-clearance areas in the U.S. could screen Canadian travellers under U.S. law, which is far more permissive in terms of the invasion of privacy.

Since Bill C-23 was first tabled, we have already seen significant developments outside our control with the change to the Trump administration. It is unquestionable that the Trump administration has attempted to quickly enact sweeping, significant, disturbing shifts in American immigration and border policy.

It is also unquestionable that these policies have already had a direct impact on Canadians, and incidents of racial profiling are already taking place. We have heard numerous stories reported in the media of Canadians being interrogated at the Canada-U.S. border. They have been asked intrusive questions about their faith and ethnic background, interrogated for hours, and ultimately refused entry to the U.S. and left humiliated.

Some of these Canadians, while Muslim, have had no connection to the countries included in the ban the Trump administration tried to impose. This was despite assurances by the Canadian government that they would not be impacted by Trump’s attempt to bring forward discriminatory travel bans. Despite some of these discriminatory executive orders being suspended by the U.S. court system, we know that Canadians are being impacted already.

Media reports so far suggest that new executive orders from Trump will be strikingly similar to those he tried to bring forward that were struck down by the courts. While I hope that there will be a change in direction with the pending new executive orders from Trump, I am not holding my breath. I fear that the troubling direction the Trump administration has signalled will continue.

With this level of uncertainty, it is my view that it would be irresponsible of the government to move forward with this bill. My colleague, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, moved a recent amendment to Bill C-23. This is a call for the House to decline to give second reading to Bill C-23. The reasons are quite simple. Let me outline them specifically for the House:

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(a) neglects to take into account the climate of uncertainty at the border following the discriminatory policies and executive orders of the Trump Administration; (b) does not address Canadians' concerns about being interrogated, detained, and turned back at the border based on race, religion, travel history or birthplace as a result of policies that may contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; (c) does nothing to ensure that Canadians' right to privacy will be protected during searches of electronic devices; and (d) violates Canadian sovereignty by increasing the powers of American preclearance officers on Canadian soil with respect to the carrying of firearms and by not properly defining a criminal liability framework.

Let me be clear, if Bill C-23 passes, the Canadian government will no longer be just complicit in the discriminatory treatment of Canadians at the border. If Bill C-23 passes, U.S. customs and border protection officers would be authorized to carry out these acts of discrimination on Canadian soil. It is unacceptable across the border, but it would become reprehensible if our government allowed this to happen within our own country. I urge all members of this House to reject Bill C-23 and support the reasoned amendment.

I would like to finish my time by sharing the concerns of one of my constituents who took the time to write to me regarding his concerns around Bill C-23.

• (1015)

He said:

I am one of your constituents...and a born-and-raised Vancouverite...I am writing today on an issue that is very important to me. For a number of years, I lived in the United States of America, legally. I had an H1B visa that was renewed for my job...I have travelled across the Canada-US border innumerable times in my life. I have also faced mistreatment from border guards on both sides. A lawyer in New York helped me with my immigration case throughout so I did everything by the book; everything above board – and yet I was still treated like a criminal on many occasions. Thankfully, I always had the right to rescind my application for entry and I also stood firm knowing the Canadian government would protect my rights, my safety and – frankly – my body from any infringements on my rights as a free, upstanding, law-abiding citizen. Bill C-23, as I understand it, would strip that safety net away from Canadians such as myself. It would leave us vulnerable to frightening searches and allow border guards to overstep the boundaries of ethics and accountability.

I understand strong border protection is of utmost importance but, as the bill is written now, I have to urge you to vote against it in parliament.

This one email is a sample of many emails I have received in my office. My phone has been ringing off the hook. People have grave concerns with Bill C-23.

Any time we debate legislation that has an impact on how Canadians leave and re-enter our country, it is vital that we take the utmost care in the examining of the details of the legislation, its broader implications, possible unintended consequences, and anticipated changes to the status quo outside of our control. We owe that to Canadians. It is our job to do exactly that.

Without adequate legislative assurances that Canadian rights will be respected in Canada, I simply cannot support the bill. I would urge all members to think about what that means for their constituents. We can hold off and see what will happen with respect to the Trump administration on the new order. We can ensure the government takes action right now to raise the concerns that many Canadians have already said need to be brought to the attention of the Trump administration.

Our government has refused to undertake that work to date. Now we are dealing with allowing increased authority to U.S. officials. It is simply wrong. When will we stand up and fight for Canadian rights and protect those rights? Bill C-23 must not pass. The recent

amendment that has been tabled should be adopted. If we adopt that, it will give us time to examine the situation and then to ensure we bring forward measures that are appropriate for all Canadians and, most important, that protect Canadian rights on the border.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when proposing amendments to a bill, it is important not to come from a place of assumptions and misinformation about profiling.

As a former customs officer, I know that their work is about enforcing Canadian laws. Bill C-23 introduces measures that are in accordance with Canadian laws and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

On what grounds are they suggesting that there are certain rights the Border Services Agency does not already have? What rights and powers are they talking about that do not fall under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the member is a former customs officer. He says that there are false accusations of racial profiling. Let me bring this to the attention of the member.

At least two cases have been brought to my attention where Canadians at the U.S. border were interrogated for hours on end. One individual, a Muslim woman, was asked why she attended mosques so often. She was asked about her opinion of Trump, as though that somehow matters. Then she was turned away after this interrogation. She was humiliated. She was not even from one of the seven countries that were identified under the travel ban. She is from Morocco. In my view, that is an example of racial profiling.

There was another case that just recently took place with a young student who was travelling to the U.S. with his fellow students and coach to participate in a sporting event. He was singled out and questioned, again, for hours on end. He was interrogated about his parents, by the way. His parents were not even travelling with him. The officers asked for cellphone and the password for it.

Yes, it is true that he could say no, but he was intimidated. He was worried. He gave it to them because he thought that if he did not give officers his cellphone and his password, they would say no. He really wanted to participate in the sporting event with his teammates. Again, in my view, is racial profiling.

These incidents are happening right now in our country.

We raised this issue with the minister and the Prime Minister. We asked them to bring these Canadian concerns to the attention of President Trump. The government refused to do so.

With Bill C-23, I anticipate things will only get worse and not better.

Government Orders

● (1025)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my former life in the aviation trade, I worked a lot with the Canadian government, as well as our U.S. counterparts, in pre-clearance and transit without visa issues, and about making Canada competitive on the world stage.

My wife and I, in our travels across the border, have also been subjected to questions that some might seem are racist or whatnot. However, our border agents, whether it is our U.S. counterparts or our Canadian customs and immigration officials, are tasked to ensure that our countries and borders remain safe and sound, and that those persons and goods coming into our countries are here for the right reasons, not for nefarious reasons.

Does my hon. colleague agree that border agents and Canada customs and immigration officials should do everything to ensure that those who come into our country are here for good reasons, that they do have policies and procedures they must go through?

I also would echo her statements that racial profiling is not something we want to do, but profiling procedures are needed. Those questions are just part of the everyday investigation techniques that have to take place to figure out if the person or persons and goods coming into the country are here for the right reasons.

Is the hon. colleague saying that we should be lessening or loosening those rules and regulations?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, let me ask the member this. Does he think it is somehow relevant for an individual to be asked at a border crossing what his or her opinion of President Trump is? Does he think that asking a person how often he or she attends mosques is somehow relevant? Is it not my right to attend a mosque or a church as often as I want? Is it anybody's business except mine? How is that relevant at a border crossing?

In one of the cases I cited, the reason why the individual was rejected and refused entry into the United States was that individual did not have valid Canadian documentation, which was not true because the individual had a valid passport in good standing until 2020 I believe.

This is what is happening. How else should we explain the situation? I am at a loss as to how a person explains the situation and justifies it. I am not saying that border officials should not do their job, but given the situation taking place right now with the Trump administration and its direction, the message, and the signal it is sending out, they are taking things down a different path and a different perspective, and that is wrong.

Bill C-23 will increase the authority given to U.S. officials at the border. I do not think we should be doing that at this juncture. We have a lot of concerns with respect to this.

People talk about trade, and I get it. It is important, but we must not jeopardize our protections, our human rights, and our Canadian values in that regard.

● (1030)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her eloquent and hard-hitting but sensitive speech.

French historian Henri Guillemin said that the most adroit politicians are experts at exploiting circumstances. Unfortunately, this Liberal government is wilfully ignoring changing circumstances in the form of a Trump administration that engages in racial profiling and discrimination at the border and violates Canadians' rights. That is clear from its decisions and its actions.

My colleague talked about the Muslim family from Brossard that was turned back at the border and Yassine Aber, a young man at university in Sherbrooke who was interrogated for five hours, when all he wanted to do was participate in a sporting event.

With Bill C-23, the Liberals are kowtowing to the Trump administration. They are rolling over and giving American customs officers all the power they want with no regard for the rights of the people we are supposed to be protecting. That is the government's responsibility.

Does my colleague think the Liberal government is handing our privacy and our rights to the Trump administration on a silver platter?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, in my view, the government is failing to stand up for Canadian values and rights. It is failing to protect those rights. The government is kowtowing to President Trump and his administration. The impacts they have caused are significant. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has gone as far as to say that nothing has changed. Everyone who I have talked to can see that things have changed, and quite drastically.

Just yesterday, the Prime Minister was on the phone with the President. Why did he not bring these Canadian concerns and issues to the attention of the President? It is really a mystery to me why he will not stand up for Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to what I believe is a very positive piece of legislation, contrary to the last 30 minutes of listening to the New Democrats trying to position themselves on this. Canadians should feel comfortable in knowing that the NDP knows nothing about what it is talking about. Quite frankly, it is difficult to understand the position that the NDP is taking on Bill C-23. It makes no sense.

Allow me to expand on that. The member started off by talking about refugees and challenged the government's approach on refugees. No government in the last number of decades has been more proactively engaged in trying to assist refugees coming to Canada than this government and this Prime Minister. The numbers will clearly show that. I do not know why the member would want to start off the debate by talking about refugees, because our government has done so exceptionally well on that particular front.

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What really set me back was that the member tried to give those who might be listening or following the debate a false impression. If we listen to the member, we should think of where we have pre-clearance today. It is at different airports, including the city of Winnipeg. After listening to the member, if one were wondering, one might think that these U.S. customs agents are going to have guns on their sides. If one were listening, it was a fear thing, that someone is going to walk into these airports and have U.S. citizens, known as customs officers and immigration officers, with guns on their bodies. That is not true. I do not know if the NDP realizes that. In the speech I heard from the member, it is just not true.

The reality is, with the legislation, they can have the same sorts of tools or equipment that Canada border control officers would have at the airport. I have a news flash for the NDP: Canada border control officers do not have guns at the airport facilities.

The member made reference to racial profiling. None of us supports racial profiling and all the nastiness that goes along with it. She talked about difficult questions that are going to be asked of Canadians and permanent residents going through these pre-clearance centres. She made it sound as if Canadians are going to go through a difficult time. Do the member and the NDP not realize what the concept of pre-clearance really is? The purpose of pre-clearance is to prevent individuals from having to go through clearance in the United States. I would much prefer to have pre-clearance here in Canada than to fly into the United States and then have to go through clearance.

The Liberal Party is the party that came up with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It was Pierre Elliott Trudeau who introduced the Charter of Rights. The legislation we are debating today would in fact guarantee the Charter of Rights for every citizen and every resident at our airports.

If one were to listen to the New Democrats, one would think that the government would be abandoning the rights of Canadians and permanent residents if the bill were to pass. I do not know where they are getting their information. Can they not recognize the true value of it?

Let me talk about the Toronto international airport. It is one of those airports that generates hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity for the city of Toronto every year. If we did not have pre-clearance at that international airport, there would be only roughly 25 or 26 destinations where we could fly from Toronto to U.S. airports. However, because of pre-clearance, it gets closer to 50 destinations. That is a very strong positive. Many of those American cities where Canadians are choosing to fly do not have the full customs and immigration facilities. Therefore, if we did not have that pre-clearance at the Toronto international airport, they would not be able to fly into those communities.

• (1035)

If we fly from airports in Canada, Winnipeg, Halifax, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal, to the United States, we have a sense of what pre-clearance is. I do not know if any New Democrats have actually participated in a pre-clearance at any of those airports, but I suspect if they checked with most Canadians, they would find it is a positive thing.

Some legislation that has passed over the years, I would classify as almost no-brainers. That is not to marginalize the issues, but if New Democrats have some legitimate concerns in regard to it, they can address those concerns at committee stage and raise them in second reading. However, I do not believe that they understand the difference between pre-clearance and arriving in the U.S. where they would have to go through the process.

It is important that we understand that. We need to understand that at the end of the day, Canada does a great deal of trade, economic commerce, and a great deal of tourism into the United States, and vice versa. Pre-clearance is not something new; it has been happening for decades. Even as governments have changed, governments have consistently looked at ways that they can enhance pre-clearance. We do that because we understand the special relationship between Canada and the U.S. The more that the Government of Canada and the Government of the U.S. work together on dealing with issues such as pre-clearance, whether it is people or cargo, the more both Canada and the U.S. benefit immensely by it.

It is estimated that there is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 600,000 direct jobs that come out of tourism. When we think of tourism, approximately two-thirds of it, from what I understand, comes from the United States. When I look at it, I see one of Winnipeg's golden gems, one of the things we truly appreciate as a tourist attraction, something called Folklorama. It is a celebration of culture and heritage of a wide variety of different ethnic groups. Typically, we have 50 pavilions that participate. I want to use this as an example of the importance of tourism.

The Minister of Small Business and Tourism, our government House leader, talked about what is important to small businesses and made reference to tourism. I believe that if members across the way, in particular New Democrats, recognize the importance of that industry, they should be supporting this legislation, not voting against the legislation. If I were to highlight tourism, I would go back to the Folklorama celebration.

Our Prime Minister often talks about one of Canada's greatest strengths, which is in fact diversity. It is our diversity that we recognize as Canada's greatest strength. We are in the time of Canada's 150th birthday. It is an appropriate time to have this kind of legislation on our 150th birthday. We should be encouraging more people to come to Canada, and those who are in Canada should be encouraged to check out many more of the Canadian sights that we have. I know this will be a very special year.

Getting back to Folklorama, it is a special celebration, which I have been attending for well over 20 years. What we can expect if we go to Winnipeg during the summertime, as many Americans do, is to participate in one of Canada's best multicultural events, and I would argue it is the best multicultural event. It goes on for two solid weeks.

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•(1040)

Roughly 50 pavilions will participate, and each pavilion will have a full evening of activities for one solid week. There will be 26 in the first week and roughly 26 in the second week. What can people expect when they walk in the door? They can expect to see some great entertainment, things like shows, which will include cultural dances, singing, arts, and heritage set-ups by different communities. I highly recommend that people participate if they want a sense of what Canada is like in terms of our multicultural society.

Why do I use that as an example? It is because roughly 15 million to 18 million tourists will come to Canada and stay overnight. Imagine the number of hotel rooms that will be utilized by those individuals, most of whom will come from the U.S.

The economic benefits of pre-clearance speak volumes with respect to the potential for growth in the future. The more we move in that direction, the better it will be for both Canada and the U.S. Canadians often fly to U.S. destinations and stay for a few nights. The convenience of being pre-cleared at a Canadian airport far outweighs clearing immigration or customs in an American city.

The member across the way and her party have referenced things like tough questions being asked and racial profiling. If we stop and think about it, I would rather be asked those tough questions and so forth on Canadian soil. Pre-clearance does that, in part. There is the opportunity for having things like Canada's Charter of Rights apply with respect to Canadian travellers. Other concerns have also been raised. However, when we look at the bigger picture, the millions of dollars in cargo that crosses our border every day, the thousands of individuals, we can agree, I am sure, that this legislation is a step in the right direction.

People should not be surprised. Since we have been in government, we have taken a proactive approach when it comes to trade and commerce. We encourage and support our middle class and those who aspire to be a part of it, and we do that in different ways. Trade matters for Canada. Canada is a trading nation. One of the reasons that we have the lifestyle we have today in Canada is because of trade.

I will go back to when our Prime Minister met with the president. Both acknowledged the benefits of our border and the importance of the trade that goes both ways. There is, generally speaking, goodwill for both nations to co-operate on facilitating that trade. Whether it is the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Trade, or their respective parliamentary secretaries, in fact the Liberal caucus as a whole, we are all proactive on that front. My home city of Winnipeg and every region of this country benefit immensely from trade.

The best buses in the world are made in Winnipeg. Some of the best tractors in the world are made in Winnipeg. If we want to talk about the aerospace industry, we need look no further than Winnipeg. I could go on about the pork industry, and so many other industries as well.

•(1045)

All of those industries are very much dependent on trade relations between Canada and the U.S., and more and more with other countries as well. This is one of the reasons we are not focusing on

just one country. We realize the benefits. We have CETA with Europe, which is a very important economy. We can talk about the special relationship between Canada and Ukraine, which is another trade agreement. In recent weeks, we were able to push both of these agreements through the House of Commons.

I can talk about the canola oil issue. It is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, but it was a controversial issue in China. As a government, we were able to deal with that, which was great news for our prairie farmers.

A great deal of things are making a positive difference. As the Prime Minister and the U.S. President have acknowledged, it is important that we look at that shared border, and if there are ways we can enhance it with issues like pre-clearance, then we should be doing it. In fact, as we are debating this bill today, the U.S. has already completed legislation of a similar nature, which is going through its process. I really do believe that there is the potential.

We have another community that is going to be seeing an expansion of the services. I am thinking of the Billy Bishop airport in Toronto, the Jean Lesage airport in Quebec City, and for some rail passengers heading into the United States, the Montreal Central Station and the Rocky Mountaineer railway in British Columbia. All would realize very tangible benefits.

The best example I could give, which I have already provided to members, is the Toronto Pearson International Airport. However, the same principle applies wherever we have seen pre-clearance being given, and it does make a difference.

We can talk to the Mayor of Winnipeg or any politician who follows the issue of the relationship between the U.S. and Canada. If they recognize the importance of trade, and of people going back and forth, then they will recognize how important it is that we have pre-clearance.

As I indicated earlier, pre-clearance has been around for decades, but we as a government have recognized that we can do better on this file. We have this legislation before us today because it would enhance Canada's opportunities going forward. It would ensure that Canadians and permanent residents, those who call Canada home, would have better access to the U.S. For small businesses and so forth, the opportunity to have items pre-cleared is becoming more and more of a reality. However, there is so much more that we can still do on the file. The Prime Minister himself will tell us that we can always do better, and we will strive to do better.

I would highly recommend that my New Democratic colleagues across the way revisit their decision on this bill. Every criticism they have levelled at the pre-clearance issue, this piece of legislation, would apply equally or more if we did not have pre-clearance for Canadians and permanent residents landing in U.S. airports. Their arguments do not seem to support the fact that they are voting against the legislation.

I will leave it at that, believing that at the end of the day Canadians would benefit immensely by the passage of Bill C-23. I highly recommend that all members of this House support it.

Statements by Members

●(1050)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before going to questions and comments, I will notify the member that his time will be running out, but we will continue with his questions and comments once we come back from question period.

The other thing I would like to point out is that some of the questions and answers have been rather long. I know it is a complicated issue and we cannot do this in a short time, but I would ask hon. members that they do this as quickly as possible so that we can get as many questions in. Some of them are kind of dragging out.

Question and comments, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I want to say that for once I am not disagreeing with our hon. colleague from across the way.

Some hon. members: Shame.

●(1055)

Mr. Todd Doherty: “Shame”, I am hearing from my own colleagues down the way. I will take that abuse.

Mr. Speaker, I indeed was in part of air service development. This bill follows up on the incredible work that former Prime Minister Harper and our team did in our previous government. I just want to state it on the record, as our hon. colleague in his earlier comments in his speech mentioned, that our colleagues from the NDP are railing against this as somehow the work that Mr. Trump is doing and the directives from his new administration. In my previous comment I mentioned an experience that my wife and I had in the course of going through an airport when people are asked certain questions. There was some profiling that was done and that was under the Obama administration and not the Trump administration.

Perhaps our hon. colleague could talk a bit more about the folk fest in Winnipeg.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is hard for me to say no to talking more about Folklorama, other than to emphasize that it is one of the greatest events in North America. It is at the end of July, beginning of August. I invite members to participate in it. Many Americans will fly into Winnipeg, many of them I suspect through pre-clearance, in order to participate.

I would emphasize that we recognize that pre-clearance is not new, which governments of all political stripes have done in the past and I suspect will continue into the future. We look at ways in which we can enhance it. By enhancing it, the biggest beneficiary, I would suggest, is Canada, Canadians, and permanent residents. We all benefit because it impacts on our trade and it impacts on people departing Winnipeg and coming back.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice that we have some levity, but this is a serious matter before us.

When I was the head of law and enforcement at the NAFTA environment commission, we grew very concerned because concerns about the movement of contaminated fuel and hazardous waste across borders were being put aside because of the push to enable trade and because of the concern that people perhaps with a brown

face or a different ethnic background became the big scare. There has been a lot of talk on the other side of the House that we need to address Islamophobia, yet we heard at committee on this very bill from Safiah Chowdhury, representative of the Islamic Society of North America, extreme concern about the implications of this bill.

By the way, I heard nothing from the member talking about any of the provisions actually in this bill. One of the provisions in this bill that was of direct concern to a lot of Canadians is the fact that people could be detained for so-called reasonable grounds, which under current law they cannot be. I wonder what the member has to say about the concerns of members of our Islamic community, members of or were born in the seven countries that are banned by the United States, or a man who simply tried to go across the States with his family and was cross-examined about his view on marijuana. Is the member not concerned that Canadians could be detained when they are trying to cross the border and not simply choose not to go?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what I am concerned about is the New Democrats seem to argue with something that is beyond me. There is no merit in what the New Democrats are saying with respect to this legislation. At the end of the day, we are talking about pre-clearance. We are not talking about when people arrive, where many of those things that the member was referring to might apply. If they are in Canada, the Charter of Rights and the Bill of Rights all apply here when they go.

Is there a detainment? That is just wrong. American customs agents cannot detain. It is only the Canadian border control and Canadians who are allowed to do any arresting or holding individuals in custody. The Americans are there to process in a pre-clearance way. Yes, they can ask questions but they can ask questions when people arrive at the other airport also. I do not really believe that the New Democrats' arguments are relevant to this bill in terms of where they point out the flaws because the flaws that they have pointed out thus far are not with respect to pre-clearance.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member will have four minutes and 47 seconds remaining in questions and comments following question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

USE OF FRENCH IN QUEBEC

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has apologized for speaking French in Quebec. Imagine that: apologizing for speaking French in Quebec. Talk about a major step backward.

It is the same old story: francophones can speak to one another in French, but as soon as there is an anglophone in the room, everyone has to speak English. I would like to remind the Prime Minister that Quebec has an official language, a common language, and that is French.

Statements by Members

How many ministers in this government are incapable of answering questions in French? Are any ministers going to apologize for not being able to speak French? No. The anglophone majority is entitled to an apology, but the francophone minority, the Quebec minority must acquiesce and submit, as the Prime Minister did.

I can guarantee that we in the Bloc Québécois will never ever apologize for speaking French. We look forward to having our own country where no one will ask us to apologize for existing.

* * *

● (1100)

ASSISTANCE TO DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which has been tasked with developing a poverty reduction strategy, last week I had the honour of meeting with many men and women who courageously devote themselves to helping disadvantaged people in our communities.

[English]

Ash Healey from RainCity Housing is one of those extraordinary human beings we met along the way. For over 20 years, he has been helping those facing homelessness and addiction. He has saved hundreds of overdose victims, and continues to be there for them. Ash made an impact on me, because like others who do what he does, it takes superhuman strength to not walk away.

We are thankful to all those organizations and individuals who met with us and shared their experiences. We owe them a debt of gratitude for all they are doing to help our fellow Canadians, for giving hope to those who are never given a chance in life.

* * *

BONANZA RESTAURANT

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a Saskatoon landmark went up in flames late Tuesday night.

The Bonanza Restaurant, a fixture on 8th Street for the past 45 years, suffered over \$2 million in damages from a fire that took over six hours to extinguish. Many thanks go out to the Saskatoon Fire Department, which responded with four engines, arriving within two minutes of the call.

Gary Baba has owned the restaurant for the last 21 years. He is shattered. He arrived on the scene at 4 a.m. to find 25 staff members huddled outside the restaurant, sharing their grief.

The buffet-style restaurant was a beloved institution for generations of families. Baba gave many students their very first job. Customers of all ages were part of that big Bonanza family. Hundreds of people in my city have taken to social media this week, sharing their fond memories.

On behalf of all Saskatonians, we share Gary's grief.

NAWFAL FAMILY

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend my heart was warmed by the generosity and love that exemplifies the very best of our community.

The parishioners of Saint-Remi Catholic church held a potluck dinner to celebrate the one year anniversary of the arrival of the Nawfal family from Syria, which they sponsored. I was honoured to meet Milad and Reham, and their two sons Bassel and Joe who are thankful to be in Canada, working and studying toward a brighter future.

[Translation]

I want to commend the Saint-Remi parishioners who sponsored the family, as well as students at the École secondaire catholique Pierre-Savard who took an idea and made it happen through fundraising and hard work. I also want to commend Father Jean-François, whose leadership and spiritual guidance are inspiring a community to demonstrate love and respect for our diversity.

[English]

I join Canadians in welcoming the Nawfal family.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to hear two days ago in the chamber the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities declare she was fully committed to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that she was working toward ratifying its optional protocol.

We have been waiting for a disability act that is serious about accessibility and inclusion, and goes farther than unenforceable guidelines and voluntary standards, one that provides real oversight to the implementation process and the means for persons living with disabilities to seek redress should the government fail in its obligations to the convention.

The minister's promises leave me very optimistic, and I do not doubt her passion and integrity. I am, however, skeptical about the government's ability and indeed its willingness to follow through on the commitments it makes.

Therefore, I look forward to assisting the minister in fulfilling her objectives, as it is my heartfelt conviction that the goal of a more inclusive and accessible Canada should transcend partisan politics.

* * *

● (1105)

HARRY HARNUM

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to Harry Harnum, or as we called him, Chief Harry. Harry served with the Bishop's Falls fire department for 41 years and for 28 years he was our chief. Through many fires and floods, Harry risked his life for his community and he truly was our inspiration.

We need look no further than his own family. Today, his son Gary is the fire chief of Bishop's Falls. His other son, Ed, is the deputy fire chief. His son Craig is the deputy fire chief of Corner Brook. His grandson Steven is now a professional firefighter and his other grandson, Tyler, is now a firefighter for the Department of National Defence at CFB Trenton.

His son Harry, daughters Beverly and Cathy, nephews, daughters-in-law, also firefighters and his greatest friend and wife for 64 years, Jewel, are indeed a family of heroes.

Chief Harry passed away this week and will be laid to rest later today at his other home at the Calvary Pentecostal Church. Yesterday, his son Craig wrote to me and said, "I am sure the honour guard of Bishop's Falls will be standing proudly with heavy hearts as they lay to rest one of their finest".

God bless.

* * *

CANADA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 1, Canada's arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation with Taiwan came into force. Taiwan is already Canada's 11th largest trading partner, with some \$6 billion in trade annually. However, there are many opportunities to strengthen Canada's economic ties with Taiwan, particularly in the areas of energy, services, and investment.

Stronger economic ties with Taiwan complements the strong people-to-people links that we share, and we share common values, including a commitment to freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Now is the time for the government to take the next step in strengthening Canada's economic ties with Taiwan. Now is the time for the government to commence negotiations on a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement with Taiwan.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge a very special initiative that is happening in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

On January 9, the initiative, "Take the Pledge Against Racism and Discrimination" was officially launched at a Sault Ste. Marie city council meeting. The project was unanimously endorsed by all of council and Mayor Provenzano.

This campaign was introduced through the Sault Ste. Marie immigration partnership and aims to combat hate and prejudice by taking a pledge. This is a chance to contribute toward building a world of justice, equality and dignity, where racism and discrimination have no place.

Today, I am pleased to announce there have been over 590 pledges taken. This initiative has gained support from organizations such as the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Statements by Members

Together, let us make a statement against racism and discrimination in our communities from coast to coast to coast. Together, let us all "take the pledge".

Please visit discoverthesault.ca.

* * *

LITERACY CHALLENGE

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to highlight a program in my riding, which is helping our community members celebrate our nation's 150th birthday by encouraging literacy and instilling a love for reading.

Students from JK to grade 8 are participating in our own Bay of Quinte Canada 150 Literacy Challenge. Through this challenge, we are inspiring our children to build personal connections to our proud Canadian heritage and culture by reading 150 pieces of Canadian literature, or written by a Canadian, or emphasizing Canadian content.

Many of our most notable civic figures have accepted the Bay of Quinte Canada 150 Literacy Challenge with enthusiasm. Schools, libraries, and community centres have also participated and hosted public reading events.

I encourage all of my hon. colleagues to consider joining the Canada 150 Literacy Challenge and bring the same joyful celebration of our nation to their communities.

* * *

NASCAR CUP SERIES

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, start your engines. The Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series begins this weekend with the Daytona 500. I am proud to rise in the House today to let all Canadians know that D.J. Kennington, from the township of Southwold, will be the first Canadian in 29 years to race in the Daytona 500, and only the eighth Canadian to ever start in the Daytona Classic.

Last night, in the last qualifying race, Kennington squeaked out a spot, and outgunned the drivers he needed to beat, securing the last of 40 starting positions in NASCAR's biggest race.

I know his wife, dad, mom, his entire family, pit crew, and co-workers from the township of Southwold are very proud of him.

As we watch D.J. race number 96 this Sunday at 2 p.m., and throughout the NASCAR Cup Series, residents of Elgin—Middlesex—London are sure to be learning the terms: #slingshot, #banking, #compressionratio, #shakinbake, as we cheer for @DJKRacing.

I wish him all the best. He is an incredible inspiration, and remember: "Elgin—Middlesex—London go fast and turn left."

Statements by Members

●(1110)

BERNIE CUSTIS

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the city of Hamilton has its own unique place in the history of black Canadians. Sadly, part of that history was lost yesterday with the passing of Bernie Custis.

In 1951, Bernie Custis began his professional career with the Hamilton Tiger Cats as pro football's first black quarterback. It did not happen in the United States until 1968.

Dad got season tickets in 1952, partly because of all the excitement Bernie was bringing to the game, and I watched him as an eight-year old in section 11. I got to know Bernie personally when he began his coaching career with the Burlington Braves and the McMaster Marauders, with an overall record in those teams of 105 wins and only 43 losses.

Bernie is in the Canadian Football, McMaster University and Syracuse University Halls of Fame. He also served his community as a teacher and principal.

His friends will remember him as a kind, intelligent, decent, and thoughtful man, whose dignity carried him through the inevitable episodes of racism sadly common during the years of his youth. We will miss him.

* * *

[Translation]

ANDRÉ SAVARIA

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, we lost a great man. André Savaria passed away at the young age of 83. Born in Sainte-Julie, he was a municipal councillor from 1972 to 1975, then mayor from 1975 to 1980.

Under his watch, countless parks and playgrounds were opened, as was the first municipal library—and let us not forget his significant involvement in getting the arena built. He also left his mark in a number of other areas. To honour his memory, the flags at city hall will fly at half-mast until March 4.

I offer my deepest condolences to the family of Mr. Savaria, his loved ones, his friends, and the people of Sainte-Julie. The lunch we had coming up will have to be postponed for now.

Mr. Savaria, as you rest in heaven keep watch over your beautiful Sainte-Julie.

* * *

[English]

MPP FOR YORK—SIMCOE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week saw a record set at Queen's Park. The member of provincial parliament for York—Simcoe, Julia Munro, became Ontario's longest-serving female MPP ever. Julia became well-known in our community when she led the successful fight to stop Bob Rae's NDP proposal to locate North America's largest landfill site on the shores of Lake Simcoe.

A history teacher, Julia went on to teach the NDP a lesson it would never forget, and made some history of her own, as she went on to become the MPP for Durham—York and joined Mike Harris in painting Ontario blue. In the legislature, she has served in many roles, including as deputy speaker for the 40th Parliament.

Having served the residents of York—Simcoe for more than 21 years, she has a track record of fighting intrusive big government and working for individual freedom. Her electoral track record of success reflects the affection that York—Simcoe residents have for Julia Munro.

It is an honour to stand in the House of Commons today and pay tribute to the amazing work that Julia Munro has done for our community and for the province of Ontario in her work at Queen's Park. I congratulate Julia.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Black History Month, I rise to recognize Mr. David Green from my community.

Mr. Green is a school board trustee in Brampton West, a bishop, and a youth counsellor. He is also the executive director of the Free For All Foundation, an organization that provides scholarships and youth programs free of charge to families in need.

Our country was built on the passion and dedication of leaders like Mr. Green. I thank Mr. Green for his continued service to our community.

Next week, I will host a round table with black Canadian community leaders from Brampton West to discuss potential solutions for the issues facing black Canadians.

I encourage all Canadians, in Brampton West and across Canada, to remember and celebrate the accomplishments of black Canadians not just this month, but every month

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada must be a force for stability in this increasingly dangerous world by acting as a counterweight to the erratic and disruptive foreign policy of President Trump. Canada has already recommitted to NATO as an alliance that guarantees the defence of all its members, by offering to lead the NATO mission in Latvia, thus blunting Trump's assertion that the Baltic States are not defensible.

Canada should oppose Trump's cavalier remarks about proliferation of nuclear weapons and other advanced weapons systems by refusing to participate in the U.S. ballistic missile defence program. Our joining would risk setting off an arms race in advanced offensive missile capability as a response.

The New Democrats believe our troops should have the support, training, and equipment they need to do the difficult and dangerous work we ask them to do every day. We hope the Liberals will keep their promise of an increase in defence spending in the upcoming budget, and of allocating enough capital spending to sustain the national shipbuilding strategy.

Only with a well-trained and well-equipped military can Canada continue to play an independent role in the world in promoting peace and security.

* * *

• (1115)

HARRIET TUBMAN AWARD

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 29, two of my constituents, Bryan and Shannon Prince, were presented with the Harriet Tubman Commitment with a Purpose Award by the Ontario Black History Society. This prestigious award is presented to individuals for their success in maintaining a tradition of excellence in their work of preserving and promoting black history.

The Princes, who curate the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum, have received several honours over their many years for their dedication to the research and education of black history. This includes the Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce citizens of the year award and the YMCA Peace Medallion.

I invite all members to join with me in celebrating Black History Month by congratulating Bryan and Shannon on receiving this esteemed award.

* * *

STAR OF COURAGE

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to acknowledge Corporal Curtis Barrett, who is joining us in the gallery on Parliament Hill today.

In October 2016, Corporal Barrett was awarded the Governor General's Star of Courage for his act of bravery, recognizing his key role in stopping the shooter at the War Memorial and Centre Block of Parliament in October 2014.

Corporal Barrett is from Labrador. In March, his hometown of Labrador City will honour him for his act of courage in the face of great peril that rocked Parliament Hill and shocked our country.

Corporal Barrett is representative of the many men and women on the front lines, defending us as Canadians, our democratic institutions, and our communities.

I thank him on behalf of all Labradorians, on behalf of all Canadians, and on behalf of all of us who serve and work on Parliament Hill, for his courage, his skills, and his action to protect in a time of crisis.

I thank Corporal Curtis Barrett.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during yesterday's debate on the carbon tax cover-up, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance offered a truly fascinating explanation as to why they needed to black out the cost of the carbon tax. She said that the memo's release would "cause confusion for Canadians". I guess Liberal studies have shown that an overdose of transparency can lead to chronic cases of confusion. Liberals are protecting Canadians from the sticker shock they will experience if they find out what this tax will actually cost them.

Will the government end the carbon tax cover-up, clear up the real confusion, and release the true costs of this tax to Canadians?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only confusion appears to be that the member opposite and the party opposite do not understand that we need to take action to tackle climate change, that polluting should not be free. We know that we need to put a price on pollution, because that means we will pollute less, actually innovate, develop clean technologies, grow our future, and ensure a more sustainable world for our children and grandchildren.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Still on the carbon tax cover-up, Mr. Speaker, today we learned that in January inflation was a third higher than expected. Bloomberg reported that the inflation growth was caused by "rising gasoline prices and new carbon levies". This supports Finance documents, which earlier said that Liberal carbon taxes would cascade throughout the economy in the form of higher prices on consumers, families, and businesses, but how much those costs would be are blacked out by the Liberals.

Now that Canadians are paying more, will the government finally end the carbon tax cover-up?

• (1120)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite were really concerned about hard-working Canadians, he wouldn't have opposed the increase in the Canada pension plan, lowering old age security to 65, increasing the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, and ensuring that Canadian families get more through the Canada child benefit. We understand that we need to support middle-class Canadians, and they also elected us to take action on climate change so that we can grow our economy and ensure a sustainable future.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of transparency, the chair of the transport committee has announced that the budget date will be March 21. Bloomberg lists the budget options as “tax, borrow, or wait”. Paul Wells said, “A funny thing happened on the way to [the Prime Minister]’s new world of justice for the middle class: the federal government ran out of money”. As Margaret Thatcher would have said, the Liberals are running out of other people’s money.

Will the finance minister finally put his head up before he runs straight on into the brick wall of reality?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward to budget 2017. What it will be is a continuation of our efforts to help middle-class Canadians, a continuation of our efforts to ensure that we actually grow our economy.

The reason we chose investment over austerity was because we knew that after a decade of meagre growth, the lowest growth for eight decades, it was time to make investments in the future of our country. That is exactly what we are doing. We are ensuring that children today, the people seeking jobs today, have those sorts of opportunities tomorrow. That is why our initiatives have created exceptional job growth, and we are looking forward to that continuing with our new budget measures.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L’Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing the Liberals can be proud of, it is their ability to come up with slogans. They come up with empty slogans, as in their plan to help Canadian businesses create jobs, slogans on the environment to justify a new carbon tax, and slogans on infrastructure investment, instead of getting projects off the ground.

I have one for them: when will the Liberals get out of the way, lower taxes on middle-class businesses, and help those working hard to create jobs in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we know is necessary in our economy is to ensure that Canadian consumers, middle-class Canadians, those people who actually need to be able to buy things for their families, are being put in a good situation. That is why we introduced the Canada child benefit. That is why we lowered middle-class taxes. What those things will do is allow people to put more money into our economy. Together with the investments we are making, what that will do is help us to grow our economy so that businesses, small businesses, medium-sized businesses, large businesses, in our country can be successful, creating jobs for Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L’Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more slogans.

For 15 months, the Liberals have been repeating ad nauseam that they want a softwood lumber agreement, but not just any agreement. So far there is no agreement, but now there is a task force that will start thinking about an agreement. Seriously. For 15 months now, the Liberals have done absolutely nothing for the 200,000 Canadians who work hard in our forestry industry.

The Liberal champion of softwood lumber, the Minister of Natural Resources, was never allowed to cross the border to defend his honour.

Will the minister take his work seriously and finally deliver a new agreement? When will we have a real Minister of Natural Resources instead of just any minister?

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind members of the House that the former Conservative government allowed the agreement to lapse. Our government is vigorously defending the interests of Canadian softwood lumber workers and producers.

We have a two-pronged approach, and the Minister of Natural Resources has announced the creation of a federal-provincial task force. We will continue our discussions with the United States, just as the Prime Minister did last week in Washington and yesterday by telephone. We are looking for a good agreement, and not just any agreement.

* * *

● (1125)

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Premier of Manitoba announced that the province will provide funding for housing and resettlement services for hundreds of asylum seekers who have risked life and limb to come to Canada. The premier also called on the federal government to set up a nationally coordinated response.

The continuation of the safe third country agreement will mean that even more refugees will come to Canada illegally. As provinces begin stepping up, why has the Liberal government taken no action and provided zero measures to address this situation? Why are they missing in action?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to maintaining a refugee system that maintains our tradition of providing compassion to those seeking safety and security in our country. We remain committed to working closely with CBSA, RCMP, and local communities. We thank communities for their generosity, and local officials for welcoming individuals who are coming over from the United States.

As far as the safe third country agreement is concerned, the hon. member may know or should know that, as of this morning, the head of the UNHCR in Canada has said that the domestic asylum system in the United States is unchanged. Therefore, the parameters and conditions of the safe third country agreement continue to be met.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is with the exception that people are fleeing and coming to border communities here in Canada because they do not feel safe in the U.S. anymore.

The Liberals' Bill C-23 would give American border guards even more powers to question, search, and even detain Canadians on Canadian soil. There are already too many reports of Canadians being unfairly harassed or profiled at border crossings. The current pre-clearance system is working well, so why are the Liberals pushing this legislation forward? Why is the government working so hard to give even more powers to Trump's border guards?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the approach by the hon. member would simply blow up Canada's border with the United States. How would that be good for the 400,000 people who cross that border every day? How would that be good for the \$2.5 billion in trade that crosses that border every day? How would that be good for the refugees who are seeking refuge when they cross that border every day?

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has said that Canada is handling the situation appropriately, and so has the Canadian Council for Refugees. It has praised our approach to dealing with this situation.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while SMEs like the businesses in the Saint-Hubert Plaza are wondering what happened to the Liberals who promised them a lower tax rate, the wealthiest members of our society are still taking advantage of tax loopholes.

The Liberals' flip-flop on their plan to increase taxes on stock options is yet more proof of the influence that rich lobbyists have on government policies, as if we did not have enough proof already.

When will the Liberal government stop letting its millionaire friends call the shots and finally put an end to tax loopholes?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that it is very important to have an efficient and fair tax system that works well for the middle class. That is why we cut taxes for the middle class. We also increased the tax rate for the wealthiest people in our country. It was the right thing to do.

SMEs need a healthy economy. That is why we are investing in our economy so that SMEs and Canadians who are looking for work will have more opportunities available to them.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as researcher Alain Deneault reminded us, when people have to wait 15 or 20 hours for emergency care, it is because of tax havens. When the subway keeps breaking down and there are not enough buses, it is because of tax havens. When there is not enough money to take care of our seniors, it is because of tax havens. This legalized tax scam is costing our country tens of billions of dollars.

The wealthiest Canadians are sending their money to the Caribbean and are not paying any taxes in Canada.

Will the Liberals crack down on this highway robbery?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to cracking down on tax havens to ensure that our fiscal system is fair and responsive to all Canadians. We know that middle-class Canadians work really hard and pay their fair share of taxes, but some wealthy individuals buy their way out by using sophisticated schemes. That is unacceptable, and it needs to change. That is why our government made an unprecedented investment of \$444 million in CRA to bolster its capacity to fight tax evasion and tax avoidance here and abroad.

* * *

● (1130)

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the innovation minister provided inaccurate information to the House. He said that the company buying seniors care facilities in British Columbia would be “owned and operated by Canadians”. He knows that this is not true. If it was being sold to Canadians, he never would have had to approve the sale.

Will the minister now stand up and tell seniors in my riding that their homes are being sold to a Chinese company with unknown ownership?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is open to investments that create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for Canadians. The application by Cedar Tree to acquire Retirement Concepts has been approved under the Investment Canada Act precisely because the investment will result in a net economic benefit to Canada.

As a result of this review, Cedar Tree has agreed to maintain full and part-time jobs at the institution. That is good for seniors, that is good for the economy, and it is good for Canada.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been thrown under the bus by Anbang Insurance Group, which issued a statement last night admitting that it is the owner. We know that Anbang Insurance is Chinese-controlled, but the ownership structure remains a mystery.

The minister claims to have done a thorough review. Has he worked his way through the 37 shells of the company? Will he tell seniors in my riding who owns their homes?

Oral Questions

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the minister undertook all necessary steps to review the investment according to the law, the Investment Canada Act. As a result of this review, Cedar Tree has agreed to maintain at least the current levels of full and part-time employees, protecting Canadian jobs. It also has agreed to have the current Canadian operator, Retirement Concepts, continue to manage the business. It has agreed to not close or repurpose any of the existing residences, and it has agreed to financially support the expansion of the business.

This is a good deal for seniors in the member's riding. This is a good deal for Canada. We are going to continue—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, British Columbians are now learning that the Liberal government has approved the sell-off of an important part of our health care system to China. The takeover of one of B.C.'s largest retirement home chains by Anbang Insurance includes no pledge to create new jobs. This Chinese conglomerate, dominated by a few who's who of the Chinese communist party, should raise red flags. It certainly has among Wall Street firms that have turned down business deals with this Beijing behemoth.

This begs the question: How did we get to a place where the wolves of Wall Street have more integrity than the Liberal government?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, it bears repeating that our government is open to investment that creates and maintains jobs, that creates growth, and that assures the long-term prosperity of Canadians.

The application by Cedar Tree to acquire Retirement Concepts was approved under the Investment Canada Act precisely because the investment will result in a net economic benefit to Canada.

As I have just pointed out in the answer to the previous question, there are guarantees for seniors, there are guarantees for the ongoing Canadian management of the enterprise, and it is good for Canada.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Wall Street firms have refused to do business with Anbang Insurance over its murky ownership structure, the Liberal government goes where angels fear to tread.

With no pledge to create new jobs in British Columbia, it is far from clear how this deal will benefit B.C. While it is far from clear that this deal will be good for Canada, we know that Chinese billionaires have been very good to the Liberal Party of Canada at \$1,500 per person cash for access fundraisers.

Is this a good deal for British Columbians, or is it a good deal for the Liberal Party of Canada?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to point out to the hon. member that among the commitments Cedar Tree has made is to invest, precisely, in the future in Canada. In addition, it is maintaining current levels of

full- and part-time employment, and it has undertaken to maintain its current Canadian operator, Retirement Concepts.

The Investment Canada Act is in place precisely to ensure that when we make these kinds of decisions, we do it in the best interests of all Canadians. We have applied those principles this time, and it is a good deal for British Columbia.

● (1135)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made a deal with his friends in Beijing to sell off part of our health care system, even before B.C. regional health authorities had signed off.

To be clear, the Chinese takeover made no commitment to create new jobs, absolutely no commitment to seniors on the quality of care, and no commitment to the quality of food or the credentials of the people caring for them.

Why are the Liberals selling off our health care system to Chinese billionaires?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I will answer that very same question from the member. Our government is open to investments that create jobs, maintain jobs, and assure growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians.

The application of Cedar Tree to acquire Retirement Concepts was subjected to a level of scrutiny according to the Investment Canada Act. The company has committed to investing in the future in the expansion of the business, in addition to maintaining current levels of employment, part-time and full-time, and in addition to maintaining the current Canadian manager of the retirement home.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we now know that Chinese insurance companies are taking control of retirement homes in British Columbia with the Liberal government's blessing, but we do not know if health care or jobs will be affected.

Can the Liberal government tell us whether it will also allow Chinese investment funds to buy retirement homes or agricultural lands in Quebec?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I just said. Our government is open to investments that create middle-class jobs and assure economic growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians. Cedar Tree's application to acquire Retirement Concepts was approved under the Investment Canada Act, whose criteria ensure that this is a good thing for British Columbia and a good thing for Canada.

Oral Questions

We have guarantees from the company, and we will be going forward.

● (1140)

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the minister said that the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal was not a court of law. As the main estimates tabled yesterday confirm, the government has yet to uphold the tribunal's ruling. The government is still refusing to comply with the ruling to end discrimination against indigenous children.

If the government thinks it has no legal obligation toward the tribunal's ruling, then what does that mean for all the cases currently before the tribunal and for Canada's Constitution?

What happened to the honour of the crown with this Liberal government?

[English]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it goes without saying that we remain committed to achieving real reform that helps move children in first nations in this country forward.

We have immediately accepted the ruling of the tribunal, and our government realized very quickly the need to overhaul the child welfare system in this country. We have started that process. We remain committed to that process, and we are investing to ensure that real reform occurs for children in first nations, who deserve to get better treatment.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the government's job to fill court vacancies so that our judicial system does not suffer. Serious criminal charges are being stayed or withdrawn due to court delays. The accused are denied their day in court, and the victims are denied justice.

Justice delayed is justice denied. The provinces are asking for support, and Canadians are beginning to lose faith in our justice system. When will the minister take responsibility for this crisis?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge my hon. colleague across the way in his new role as critic. I look forward to working with him on these important matters as we seek to maintain the confidence the Canadian public has in the justice system.

I am committed to continuing to add to the number of judges I have appointed to our superior courts through a new process of appointments, with newly constituted judicial advisory committees that reflect the diversity of the country. I will be, in the near future, continuing to appoint superior court judges in jurisdictions across the country.

FINANCE

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's mortgage rule changes are failing to fix the problems in Vancouver and Toronto and are hurting markets in Atlantic Canada, which are already depressed.

Sherry Donovan, of the Nova Scotia Home Builders' Association, told the finance committee that the Atlantic provinces are "still in deep recovery mode from the weak economy.... These new mortgage rules are exacerbating the problem by hurting the entire economy".

Will the minister stop kicking the Atlantic provinces when they are down and reverse his ill-advised decision? Why will the 32 Liberal MPs from the region not stand for Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that across our country, Canadians care enormously about the value of their homes. We know that it is very important for our government to protect the value of their homes by having appropriate regulations that ensure that the market works for their best interests. That is what we are working towards. We want to make sure that the market works. We want to make sure that people are protected in their most important investment and that they can have confidence that it will be there for them in the long term in terms of its value.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals claim to support the middle class and those looking to join it. However, seniors in my riding are concerned that the Liberal government is intent on making their lives more difficult. The Minister of Finance has refused to protect income splitting. Now there are reports that suggest that the Liberals are considering removal of the age amount tax credit, which helps low- and middle-income seniors.

Why are the Liberals threatening the very generation that helped build our nation in the first place?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak a bit about the agenda we have for seniors, a very strong agenda, and not only for this generation of seniors, many of whom are being taken out of poverty through the increase in the guaranteed income supplement and the lowering of the age of eligibility to 65 years—100,000 seniors will not need to enter into severe poverty—but also through the enhancement of the Canada pension plan, which is going to take 300,000 future seniors out of income vulnerability.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has dictated that the provinces must collect his carbon tax. In true Liberal fashion, Premier Wynne has secretly planned to apply HST to their new cap-and-trade plan and will hide the cap-and-trade tax in the delivery charge. Ontarians are not only paying more for heat and hydro but now will be paying tax on tax.

When will the Prime Minister stand up for his Ontarians and tell his Ontario Liberal friends to start helping the middle class instead of taxing them to death?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 80% of Canadians live in a jurisdiction where there is already a price on pollution.

The good news is that provinces stepped up when the previous government did not. We know that putting a price on what we do not want, pollution, will foster what we do want, which is good jobs, a cleaner economy, and innovation. We are proud of what we are doing, and we are going to continue moving forward.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ever since this government came to power, there has been no end to the tax measures that hurt middle-class families. They are forced to pay more taxes and all sorts of exorbitant fees, and we still do not know whether dental care will be taxed as well.

Sometimes I wonder whether the Liberal slogan should be, “I tax, therefore I am”.

Do Canadians need to pay \$1,500 to the Minister of Finance to get him to listen to them and agree to reduce their tax burden?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fortunately for the middle class, we have already lowered their taxes. That is the first thing we did.

Thanks to this reduction, a single person will pay \$330 less in taxes, and a family will pay \$540 less. Those are the facts. We also brought in the Canada child benefit, which will give nine in 10 families an extra \$2,300 tax-free. This is good for the middle class and Canadian families.

* * *

● (1145)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been a year since the government started the Phoenix pay fiasco. For months, over 360 employees at Saskatchewan's federal penitentiary went without proper pay. To protect Canadians, we must ensure that guards who are overseeing maximum security prisoners are not distracted by ongoing payroll problems.

Will the Minister of Public Safety, who is also from Saskatchewan, ask the Minister of Public Services to finally fix the Phoenix pay system once and for all?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, in Saskatchewan, as elsewhere, resolving the problems that we inherited from the other side in terms of the public service pay problems is our priority. We are obviously working tirelessly with—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am having a hard time hearing. Maybe members can keep it down. I am sure they have comments, but maybe they could keep them among themselves, and then we can hear the answer.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, we are obviously working tirelessly with public servants, their representatives and unions, and other government departments to find and implement solutions to problems as they arise. We are taking measures, such as implementing emergency pay advances, opening temporary satellite offices, and recruiting more than 200 additional compensation advisers, many, of course, who were let go prematurely by the former government.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are tired of the current government's broken promises.

My riding of Windsor—Tecumseh hoped the Prime Minister would deliver on promises for mail delivery, first nations, Bill C-51, and climate change. They were not the only ones. Canada's foremost environmentalist, David Suzuki, said the Prime Minister is “an out-and-out”, but then he uses a word that is unparliamentary but it means “misleading Canadians”.

Will anyone on the Liberal benches stand up and demand that their government start practising what they used to preach?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased last year when the Prime Minister stood with the premiers from the provinces and territories to announce a climate plan.

We are serious about taking action on climate change, because we know it is the right thing to do. It will also create good jobs, help grow the economy, and ensure a more sustainable future for our children.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall our government announced a federal investment of \$7.9 million to launch the first phase of dismantling the *Kathryn Spirit*, a vessel that was abandoned on the shores of Beauharnois in 2011.

Oral Questions

[English]

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard update this House on the progress of this projects as well as what the government will do to address derelict vessels across the country?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in November, the Minister of Transport announced the first phase in ensuring the permanent removal of the *Kathryn Spirit* from the shores of Beauharnois. The work started in December to further secure the vessel by building an embankment around it to separate it from the marine environment. On February 20, this work was completed ahead of schedule and on budget.

Our government also recently announced a \$1.5-billion investment in the oceans protection plan, which includes a comprehensive strategy to address other abandoned derelict and wrecked vessels in Canadian waters.

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TAXATION

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Kathleen Wynne's example is clear: failed Liberal policies and skyrocketing energy costs go hand in hand. Every day we hear new concerns from seniors who cannot afford to heat their homes, and small businesses whose energy costs are doubling.

Now the Liberals are refusing to release the numbers that would show the actual cost of the carbon tax on Canadian families. Why the carbon tax cover-up? Will the Liberals do the right thing and release the numbers or are they going to keep Canadians in the dark?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to do the right thing by tackling climate change and growing our economy, because we were elected to do that. When Canadians voted, they said that they wanted to see action on climate change, which did not happen in the past decade.

We understand that we can grow a clean economy, we can reduce our emissions, and we can ensure a more sustainable future for our children. That is the smart thing to do, and that is the right thing to do.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his mentor, Kathleen Wynne, are driving greenhouse operations out of business in my riding with the green energy policies. One greenhouse grower said that his natural gas costs will double from \$120,000 a year to \$240,000 a year because of carbon tax.

Why are these small businesses being penalized by the Prime Minister and the Wynne Liberals, and being forced to shut down or move to the U.S.?

• (1150)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that we are taking strong action on climate change, including putting a price on pollution. Once again, we are putting a price on what we do not want, which is pollution, and fostering what we do want, which is

clean growth, jobs, and innovation. Business owners have stood up and said that this is the right thing to do, that this is what we need to do to prepare for the future. This is what will create growth. It will grow our economy and will ensure a more sustainable future for our kids.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my province of Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction to stand up to the Liberal government's carbon-tax scheme. Unlike these Liberals, my province has actually shared the numbers. Listen, a minimum of over \$1,200 for the average Saskatchewan family and up to \$100,000 per family farm. Where is the Liberal government's analysis? What is the cost, and why the carbon-tax cover-up?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very proud that we were able to work with the Government of Saskatchewan on our climate change plan; for example, to phase out coal and to invest in innovation. I also had the chance to go to Saskatchewan. I listened to farmers and ranchers who feel the impacts of climate change already and are actually doing interesting climate research. They are developing climate-resilient crops and zero-till agriculture. We are going to continue working with them because we understand it is the right thing to do for the future but also for farmers.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Members were doing well, but everything started picking up again. If members do not mind just holding it down, that is the way it should be when someone is answering.

The hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2016, Saskatchewan lost 6,000 full-time jobs. Agriculture employment is down 19% year over year. At a time when my constituents are struggling to find work, the Liberals are forcing a carbon tax that will affect vulnerable Canadians. These constituents need to be able to feed their families and heat their homes without worrying about paying more taxes. Why are the Liberals trying to pay for their reckless spending at the expense of hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I am perplexed. Does the party opposite not understand that climate change is real, that it is having its impacts, that it is causing floods, and that it is causing droughts in Saskatchewan? Does it not understand that we need to take action because it is the right thing to do? Putting a price on carbon pollution is the most efficient way to reduce emissions, to grow the economy, and to ensure a sustainable future.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the backlog veterans face waiting for their pensions is a disgrace. Our veterans are going into debt just to make ends meet. This needs to stop now.

There is a simple fix. Follow the military ombudsman's advice and do not discharge a veteran until all pensions, benefits, and services are in place and are understood. When is the minister going to get his house in order so that veterans are not left struggling to survive?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's investment in the Canadian Armed Forces pension plan reflects the important contribution made by its members in defending Canada's interests, both at home and abroad. The department continues to work diligently to improve the processing of Reserve Force members' pensions. In July, the administration of Canadian Armed Forces pensions was transferred to Public Services and Procurement Canada. This is expected to streamline and improve the payment of pension benefits.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday I attended the funeral of Carl Jason Dunphy, a young veteran from my riding who died tragically on February 11. A few hours before his death, he posted the following message about his difficulties in getting help from Veterans Affairs: "It's eating away at my resources and my strength. It's not up to friends and spouses to deal with this because a government organization doesn't act."

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Carl Jason Dunphy's life, his service, and his memory deserve so much more than just a list of statistics read from a cue card.

I am asking the minister again: will the department conduct an internal investigation of the circumstances surrounding his death?

[*English*]

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his advocacy on behalf of veterans and their families and his constituents. I know this is an extremely difficult situation. Any time Veterans Affairs is notified of an untimely or unexpected death we undertake a review of that file, and this will be the case.

Our government is committed to expanding access to support the veterans and RCMP and their families. That is why we are working with over 4,000 registered mental health professionals, we are expanding our outreach capability by having nine points of contact reopened, as well as hiring front-line staff. We will continue to support veterans and their families.

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a disgrace that the Liberals have drastically cut funding for 70 military museums this year when we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation. It is shameful but very telling of the Liberals' lack of respect for the Canadians who served their country.

Now that the minister has had the time to learn about this odious decision, which he seemed to be unaware of yesterday, can he explain the reason for the decision and tell us how much he has cut from the funding for these institutions that preserve the memories of our heroes?

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I am just as concerned as he is. There is a museum in the riding of Saint-Jean.

As the minister said yesterday, he is not familiar with the situation and he has asked for an update. We will be pleased to explain the situation to the member.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 150th anniversary of Confederation and the 100th anniversary of the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge.

The Royal Canadian Regiment Museum in London, Ontario has a display on the victory at Vimy Ridge. Among the medals and artifacts one finds the words, "Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line they prepared for the worst."

Our Canadian heroes were not prepared for the latest in friendly fire from the Liberals in Ottawa. Why is funding for this museum and its Vimy exhibit being cut off by the Liberals this anniversary year? Why this Liberal war on history?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I am very concerned by the member's question because there is a museum in the riding of Saint-Jean, right at the military college.

Yesterday, the minister was informed of this matter. He has asked for an update on the situation, and we will be pleased to respond to the member during the next question period.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I asked Dr. Merali, president and CEO of the Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research, if brain imaging could be used to identify mefloquine toxicity. He said, absolutely so. Canada has the capability to scientifically validate our veterans' claims of brain stem injury from mefloquine. Veterans believe this drug is destroying their lives, causing severe depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

When will the Prime Minister join our allies, commit to a mefloquine toxicity study, and stop using mefloquine and prescribing it to our soldiers?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of all Canadian Armed Forces members are critically important to our government.

Malaria is an infectious disease that can endanger the lives of our military personnel, who can be exposed in the course of their duties. Members of the military make personal decisions regarding malaria prevention in close co-operation with their health care professionals, based on an assessment and extensive medical information. Mefloquine remains a Health-Canada-approved drug that is offered to military personnel to prevent malaria. The use of this drug is now the exception.

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[English]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year in Ontario alone there were 144 laser strikes on aircraft. The Ottawa International Airport in my riding is a possible venue for these types of incidents. Laser strikes can seriously blind someone operating an aircraft. All of us were very concerned by the recent event in Elgin County where a police helicopter was struck by a laser strike. This is serious business.

Could the parliamentary secretary please inform the House on the actions the government is taking on this file to ensure air safety in Canada?

● (1200)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ottawa South for his concern. Safety is a top priority for this government and we are also very concerned about the recent increase in laser strikes. Pointing a laser at an aircraft is more than just dangerous, it is also illegal. That is the reason why the Minister of Transport met with various law enforcement officials to emphasize just how reckless this action is and to ask for the public's help when they see something like this happening, for them to call 911 and let police officials know. That is the only way to make change.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to help victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide. By finally agreeing to bring Yazidi refugees to Canada, the government has accepted in principle the need to focus on the most vulnerable. At the same time, Assyrian Christians and Rohingya Muslims are also the victims of ethnic cleansing. Canadians are generous and they want to help those who are actually most vulnerable. Will the Liberals help and prioritize vulnerable Assyrians and Rohingya?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud of Canada's tradition of compassion toward those who are fleeing war and persecution. We focus on the most vulnerable.

We continue to work with the UN Refugee Agency to identify the most vulnerable people who need resettlement. We also work very closely with private sponsors in Canada to make sure that Canada continues its tradition of welcoming those who are vulnerable and who seek safety and security in Canada.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, believe it or not, but March will soon be upon us. In a few days, we will be celebrating International Women's Day and recognizing the enormous contribution of women to our society.

That day is also an opportunity to look at what has been accomplished, but even more important, to consider the challenges that remain and the obstacles that must still be overcome to ensure greater equality between men and women. That applies to all sectors of society and to the military.

What can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence tell the House about recent progress in ensuring better representation of women in the armed forces?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for drawing attention to International Women's Day. Canada is firmly committed to increasing the number of women at all rank levels. Major-General Tammy Harris will become the deputy commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, becoming the first woman to hold such a post in the navy, army, or air force.

I hope that more women will work their way up the ranks so that, in the future, one of them will become the chief of the defence staff.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, without freedom of speech, no other freedom is possible. Canada was ranked eighth in the world by Reporters Without Borders in their 2015 World Press Freedom Index. After just one year under the current Prime Minister, we have dropped 10 spots, to number 18 in the world. Namibia, Jamaica, Costa Rica, are all ahead of us.

Why is the Liberal government failing to uphold our freedom of speech and freedom of the press?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to human rights, this government has been unequivocal, both at home and abroad, around the world. Human rights is an integral part of our foreign policy because it is integral to who we are as Canadians.

Canadians can rightly be proud of the progress we have seen, and which this government has helped achieve, in promoting and protecting human rights both at home and abroad. There is more to be done. We are just getting started.

Oral Questions

We look forward to working with members in the House and groups, both at home and around the world, to help advance human rights globally.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, seasonal workers in all regions of Quebec have reached the end of their employment insurance benefits. They have to find another way to make it until the next season begins, either through social assistance or by living off their credit cards. In any case, they will have to go into debt. People are struggling and having a hard time putting food on the table, because the government refuses to understand the reality of our regions, because Ottawa does not give a damn about Quebec.

When will this government wake up and recognize that it is the work that is seasonal, and not the workers, and resolve the spring gap or "black hole" problem once and for all, by extending the minimum entitlement period? This is urgent.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to my colleague for giving me the opportunity to remind the House of some very important measures our government has taken since coming to power to improve the quality of services to unemployed Canadians across the country, and especially the quality of benefits. Plus, we have also made it easier for Canadians to get the support they need from the Canadian government when they go through the often difficult time of a period of unemployment. There is still a lot of work to do, and we look forward to tackling it.

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● (1205)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberals promised a wonderful infrastructure bank through which municipalities could borrow money at the federal government rate. Wow.

However, once the Liberals took office, they changed the way the infrastructure bank will operate. Ottawa is now going to allow its friends on Bay Street to borrow at the government rate to help them get their hands on Quebec's municipal infrastructure, without having to answer to the Auditor General.

Does the government realize that it is doing exactly the opposite of what it promised with its infrastructure privatization bank?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that investing in infrastructure helps us grow our economy and creates opportunities. We are doubling our investments to \$180 billion over the next 10 to 12 years. We will be investing in Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast.

The infrastructure bank will further mobilize private capital to build more infrastructure that is required by our Canadian communities

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[Translation]

PARKS CANADA

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since 2012, the Bloc Québécois has been speaking out against the federal government's decision to store artifacts from the national parks in a warehouse in Gatineau.

The history of Quebec, from the founding of New France to the Forillon expropriation, must remain accessible to our historians, our archeologists, and the public. However, despite the opposition of the Quebec National Assembly and the City of Quebec, Ottawa spent \$45 million on a warehouse that no one in Quebec wants.

Will the government back off and leave our heritage and that of the first nations where it is, so that it is accessible to the people of Quebec, as the members of the Bloc Québécois have been calling for five years?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the treasures that speak to our identity, our history, our culture, and the contributions of indigenous peoples be protected and preserved. Parks Canada is responsible for protecting that heritage.

I am listening and I am prepared to work with my federal colleagues, the City of Quebec, the province, and the staff at Parks Canada in order to ensure that the public and anyone who is interested can access the artifacts in a timely manner.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. On February 9, the Prime Minister, along with the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development had the great pleasure of visiting my riding of Nunavut. When there, the Prime Minister signed a declaration with Inuit Nunangat leadership to create the Inuit-Crown partnership committee.

Inuit are eager to hear how this committee will change the way the federal government engages with them, and what tangible benefits we can expect from it.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to work in genuine partnership with indigenous people to advance reconciliation, just as we did in signing the declaration with Inuit. I know the member opposite supports moving forward in that direction.

I was pleased to be in Iqaluit with the Prime Minister, the ministers and leaders of the Inuit Nunangat region, along with the president of ITK.

This agreement means we will work together, government to Crown with Inuit people, to ensure we can deal with the long, dark tragedies of the past of Inuit people in our country, whether it be around relocation, tuberculosis, or residential school settlement. However, it also allows us to move forward in the right direction, working together to build stronger Inuit communities in the north.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women concerning Bill C-309, an act to establish gender equality week, which was read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

• (1210)

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans entitled, “Review of Changes made in 2012 to the Fisheries Act: Enhancing the Protection of Fish and Fish Habitat and the Management of Canadian Fisheries”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I would also add that the committee heard from many groups, including indigenous communities and inshore fishers, primarily in eastern Canada, in relation to this study. While the majority of the committee felt that some of the feedback from these groups fell outside the scope of the committee's study, the committee will be providing this information to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard by way of letter.

Yesterday we had the honour of discussing private member's bill, Bill S-208. I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in relation to Bill S-208, an act respecting national seal products day. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Conservative Party members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, a dissenting report highlighting the concerns of the Conservative Party in both the process and recommendations.

Our number one concern is that while there is significant concern that direct return to the prior definition of “harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat” may result in the same problems that precipitated the need for changes in the act in 2012.

Routine Proceedings

The committee heard a number of witnesses and testimony over the very limited time. Despite the opposition party's request for an increased amount of time and consultation, there was insufficient time to do this consultation process properly.

Conservative Party members want to acknowledge the considerable amount of work that both the clerks and members on all sides undertook in this non-partisan report. However, we have some significant concerns.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs entitled, “Supplementary Estimates (C) 2016-17: Votes 1c and 10c under Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development”.

* * *

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-338, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (punishment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce a bill that would amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in order to increase sentences for offences related to the importing and exporting of controlled drugs and substances. Some of these lethal drugs and substances include methamphetamines, ecstasy, fentanyl, and W-18. These substances are a scourge on our communities, which are now plagued by deadly opiate epidemics. Those who import and export these drugs and substances must be punished through increased mandatory minimum sentences.

I will always work to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians, especially my constituents in Markham—Unionville. I hope members of the House will support the bill.

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

* * *

• (1215)

CANADIAN FORCES MEMBERS AND VETERANS RE-ESTABLISHMENT AND COMPENSATION ACT

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-339, an act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act (death benefit).

Routine Proceedings

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a bill today that will allow more flexibility for veterans who do not have a spouse or dependent children. As it stands now, no death benefit is awarded at the time of a veteran's death if there is no spouse or dependent children. This means that older children or parents caring for a veteran are ineligible to receive the benefit. This bill will allow veterans to appoint a family member or members as the beneficiary of their death benefits should they pass away without a spouse or dependent child. This bill will make it more equitable for veterans and their families whose family makeup may not reflect the traditional family model.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

OVARIAN CANCER

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions today concerning ovarian cancer research. Ovarian cancer is the most fatal women's cancer in Canada. Unfortunately, investment and research have fallen well behind that of other cancers. This year, 2,800 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer and 1,750 will die from the disease. Outcomes for ovarian cancer have not changed in 50 years. Treatments have not changed significantly since the 1990s.

Thousands of petitioners from across Canada are calling upon the Government of Canada to approve an immediate additional investment of \$10 million for ovarian cancer research to help save the lives of thousands of Canadian women diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and to bring hope to their families.

[Translation]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition concerning the protection of animals in the event of natural disasters.

[English]

This is a petition to the Minister of International Development to protect animals during disasters. I have 150 signatures from concerned citizens who would like to see the minister pay special attention to this issue in our missions abroad.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this afternoon to present two petitions.

The first petition, signed by many local residents, is with respect to an issue of real concern. The Saanich Inlet is an extremely important and sensitive ecosystem. It has a very low flushing capacity. For very good reason, it is increasingly used by recreational boaters, because it is a beautiful place. The problem is that as these recreational vessels come in, we are seeing a problem with the discharge of sewage. The petitioners point out that for some years now, residents have been seeking the designation of Saanich Inlet as a zero-discharge zone. The petitioners are asking for action on this issue.

● (1220)

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is of a national flavour. It is signed primarily by residents of my own riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands. It calls upon the Government of Canada to develop a national homelessness strategy. It particularly points out the creative notion that we should return the tax benefits that used to accrue to developers who were building purpose-built apartment rental units. That is one of the ways we can create more available housing along a continuum, from those who are homeless to those who simply cannot afford to buy a home in the current market.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present an electronic petition with 1,428 signatures on it, very similar to the petition presented by the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert, calling upon the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie to support the lives and livelihoods of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people by investing in the protection of livestock before and after disasters. This would strengthen food security, nutrition, gender equality, livelihoods, and promote sustainable growth.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a supplementary response to Questions Nos. 604, 612, 633, 656, 670, 675, 677, 679, 681, 696, 701, and 703, originally tabled on January 30, 2017, could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 604—**Mr. Ted Falk:**

With regard to the government's planned legalization and regulation of marijuana, since November 4, 2015: (a) what are the details of any consultations or meetings which have been held with stakeholders including (i) date, (ii) locations, (iii) attendees; (b) what are the details of any briefing notes or correspondence related to the meetings referred to in (a), including (i) title, (ii) date, (iii) sender, (iv) recipient, (v) subject matter, (vi) file number; (c) what is the content of any information provided to the Minister of Justice and her parliamentary secretaries by (i) the Department of Justice, (ii) the Department of Health, (iii) the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, (iv) the Department of Finance, (v) the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; (d) has the Minister of Justice or her officials consulted other jurisdictions that have legalized marijuana; and (e) if the answer to (d) is in the affirmative, what are the details, including (i) jurisdictions consulted, (ii) findings for each consultation?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 612—Mr. Tom Lukiwski:**

With regard to consultation surveys posted on various government websites, broken down by individual survey: (a) what is the title and description of each survey; (b) what steps were taken to ensure that results were representative of the Canadian population as identified by Statistics Canada; (c) what controls are used to ensure that those responding to the survey are from Canada and not from another country; (d) what efforts have been made to prevent an individual from taking the same survey multiple times; (e) were any outside groups or organizations consulted in the development of any survey; (f) if the answer to (e) is affirmative, what are the names of all groups or organizations that were directly consulted in the development of the survey questions, broken down by survey; and (g) what is the total cost of each survey?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 633—Mr. Len Webber:

With regard to credit cards issued to Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries: what expenses were charged to a government credit card, and not paid for by the government for the period of November 4, 2015, to September 23, 2016, including (i) the name of the vendor and the place of purchase, (ii) the date of the purchase, (iii) the value of the purchase, (iv) the due date of the statement, (v) the date on which the card holder provided reimbursement in full, (vi) the name of the card holder, (vii) the official job title of the card holder, (viii) the confirmation if that card holder is still an active holder of a government credit card?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 656—Mr. Kevin Waugh:

With regard to government sponsorship of the Open Dialogue Forum held in Ottawa on March 31, 2016, and April 1, 2016: (a) how much did the government spend to sponsor the event; (b) which government departments, agencies, or crown corporations sponsored the event; (c) which Ministers approved the sponsorships; and (d) what are the internal tracking or file numbers for the sponsorship contracts?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 670—Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:

With regard to travel taken by Ministers and their exempt staff to the constituencies of Kenora, Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Thunder Bay—Superior North, Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Timmins—James Bay, Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskwasing, Nickel Belt, Nipissing—Timiskaming, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Parry Sound—Muskoka, Mississauga—Malton between November 4, 2015, and November 30, 2016: (a) what are the details of all trips taken, including the (i) dates, (ii) amount spent, (iii) breakdown of expenses, (iv) details of any official meetings or government business conducted on the trips; and (b) what are the details of any briefing documents or dockets prepared in relation to the trips, including the (i) date, (ii) title or subject matter, (iii) department's internal tracking number?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 675—Mr. Matt Jeneroux:

With regard to briefing documents, memorandums or dockets prepared regarding a price on carbon or a carbon tax by any department, agency, Crown Corporation, or other government entity, since November 4, 2015: what is (i) the date, (ii) the title or subject matter, (iii) the department's internal tracking number, (iv) the recipient?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 677—Mr. Harold Albrecht:

With regard to meetings between the government and the Cannabis Friendly Business Association, since November 4, 2015: what are the details of all meetings the government, including Ministers and their exempt staff Members, have had with the Association, including (i) date, (ii) location, (iii) attendees, (iv) topics discussed, (v) titles and file numbers of any related briefing notes or documents?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 679—Mr. Harold Albrecht:

With regard to government communications, for each announcement made by a minister or parliamentary secretary in the National Capital Region in a location other

than the parliamentary precinct or the National Press Theatre, since November 4, 2015: (a) what was the (i) date, (ii) location, (iii) purpose or subject matter, (iv) name and portfolio of the minister or parliamentary secretary involved; and (b) what were the amounts and details of all expenses related to making each such announcement?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 681—Mr. Martin Shields:

With regard to private security expenditures by the government, broken down by department, agency, crown corporation, or other government entity, since November 4, 2015: what are the details of each such expenditure including (i) date, (ii) amount, (iii) vendor, (iv) details of contract, including duration, (v) location where security was to be provided, (vi) whether the contract was competitive or sole-sourced?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 696—Mr. Tom Kmiec:

With regard to immigration to Canada, between November 4, 2015, and December 6, 2016: (a) how many economic class immigrants have been admitted to Canada; (b) how many family class immigrants have been admitted to Canada; (c) how many refugees have been admitted to Canada; (d) how many temporary student visas were issued and how many individuals were admitted to Canada on a temporary student visa; (e) how many temporary worker permits were issued and how many individuals were admitted to Canada on a temporary worker permit; (f) how many temporary visitor records were issued and how many individuals were admitted to Canada on a temporary visitor record; (g) how many temporary resident permits were issued; (h) how many temporary resident permits were approved by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; (i) for (a) to (h), what is the breakdown for source country for each class of migrant; (j) for applications for the categories enumerated in (a) to (h), how many individuals were found inadmissible under section 34 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act; (k) for applications for the categories enumerated in (a) to (h), how many individuals were found inadmissible under section 35 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act; (l) for applications for the categories enumerated in (a) to (h), how many individuals were found inadmissible under section 36 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act; (m) for applications for the categories enumerated in (a) to (h), how many individuals were found inadmissible under section 37 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act; and (n) for applications for the categories enumerated in (a) to (h), how many individuals were found inadmissible under section 40 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 701—Mr. John Barlow:

With regard to the government's usage of collection agents, since November 4, 2015, and broken down by department, agency, and crown corporation: (a) how much has been spent on collection agents or agencies, including fees, commissions, salaries, recovery costs, and other expenses; (b) how many debts have been assigned to collection agents or agencies; (c) how many of the debts referred to in (b) have since been recovered in full; (d) how many of the debts referred to in (b) were (i) personal, (ii) corporate; (e) what is the total value of debts assigned to collection agents or agencies; (f) what is the total value of debts fully recovered to date by collection agents; and (g) what are the policies in place regarding fee structures paid to collection agents or agencies?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 703—M. Gordon Brown:

With regard to materials prepared for ministerial exempt staff since November 4, 2015: for every briefing document, memorandum or docket prepared, what is (i) the date, (ii) the title or subject matter, (iii) the department's internal tracking number, (iv) the recipient?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

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

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PRECLEARANCE ACT, 2016

The House resumed from consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act respecting the preclearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary has five minutes and 30 seconds remaining for questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to note that the member was insinuating that New Democrats somehow did not understand what is contained in Bill C-23.

I wonder whether the member missed the parts where the bill actually increases the powers for U.S. border guards on Canadian soil in provision of carrying firearms, strip-searching, detention, and interrogation.

I wonder if the member missed the lack of provisions protecting the rights and freedoms of transgender persons during strip searches, and I wonder if the member missed the provision in Bill C-23 that provides for the invasion of privacy on Canadian soil with regard to the search of travellers' electronic devices and access to the digital universe.

Last, I would like the member to answer this question. Peter Edelman, who is the lawyer and member of the national immigration section of the Canadian Bar Association, said he is concerned about the application of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He asked how we can be assured that the U.S. CDP's pre-clearance officers will be subjected to the charter. The bill does not specify their status as agents of the state.

I would love to hear from the member in response to the issues I just brought to his attention. Perhaps he has not read the bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have gone through the bill's briefing notes and am familiar with the bill itself. I have been through it not on one occasion but on two occasions, where I have had some form of a debriefing of sorts or have had the opportunity to read through it.

That is one of the reasons I posed the comments that I did earlier after the member had spoken. When we listen to New Democrats speak to Bill C-23, we would be given the opinion that the sky is falling and that the infringement of rights will be overwhelming on Canadian citizens and permanent residents whenever they go to a pre-clearance venue. Nothing could be further from the truth.

At the end of the day, we are talking about a pre-clearance. Individuals who are going into the United States can go through the pre-clearance, which then precludes them from having to go through

a clearance once they land on American soil. When we are on Canadian soil, the Canadian Charter of Rights applies.

New Democrats seem to be in fear of these bogus phantoms, which I do not believe they have been successful at being able to justify. I do not understand why they are voting against the bill going to committee stage. The information is there. It is within the bill. Canadians and permanent residents do not have anything to fear in regard to their rights. Their rights are in fact being protected.

• (1225)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noted that the Parliamentary Secretary to the House Leader stressed the importance of the relationship that we have, the co-operation we have, with the United States, and I would totally agree with that. Constituents in my riding who are vacationing in the U.S. have reported back to me that the NDP's defamatory and disrespectful comments about the President of the United States have hit the media and are angering the U.S.

Would the member opposite agree that the NDP's attitude is most unhelpful with one of our most important trading partners?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we recognize that almost \$2.5 billion of transactions occur between Canada and the U.S. every day. Millions of Canadians go back and forth between the U.S. and Canada every year. It is important that we recognize that as a special relationship. We have that relationship with no other country, and the U.S. has that relationship with no other country. Canada benefits by it. The U.S. benefits by it. This legislation would further advance that special relationship.

The NDP's approach to the U.S. would have one conclude that it has a strong anti-U.S. element within its caucus. Just listening to the number of questions or presentations, whether on this legislation, other legislation, or question period, one would draw the conclusion that we should be concerned in terms of that anti-American feeling that those members may have given the importance of the U.S. to Canada.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to split my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock today.

I rise to speak in support of Bill C-23, for several reasons. I will start with an overview of what the bill would do. I have had a lot of questions in my constituency about the bill.

Bill C-23 seeks to carry out some of the items that were part of the beyond the border plan, which former Prime Minister Harper and former President Obama put together. The agreement was put together to ensure that the long-term, positive relationship Canada and the United States have shared was strengthened over time through certain measures on the integrity of our borders and the management of the flow of traffic.

Government Orders

As my colleagues on the government side have said, it is important to note the volume of trade that occurs across this border on a daily basis. More than \$2.5 billion worth of trade in goods, services, vehicles, etc., cross the border on a daily basis. That is why it is very important for us to maintain positive relations with the United States within a framework that respects the sovereignty of both nations and the rule of law in both nations and that also ends up being a positive experience for all involved.

It is important to go back to the beyond the border agreement when looking at the context of the bill. I would encourage anyone who has heard some of the myths about the bill to look at that agreement. Those listening today might look at this as a reaction to Trump or as a result of the Trump presidency, which I will get to later.

The original beyond the border agreement was actually negotiated under the Obama administration. It addressed things like addressing threats early, such as threats against border security, and facilitating trade. It addressed cross-border law enforcement, critical infrastructure, and cybersecurity.

Something worth noting is that there is a formal development and a statement of principle on privacy. Former Prime Minister Harper, as well as former President Obama, actually signed, in 2011, a joint statement on privacy principles. It is worth looking through it, because I know there has been some concern about privacy with regard to the bill. I feel that the principles included in that statement would be upheld by this, including things like maintaining all reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of information and the continued right to have access and to request the correction of errors, etc. I encourage people to read this particular piece of information, because it provides good context as to why this particular bill is quite sound.

I want to address some of the issues that have been brought to the attention of my office by some of my constituents. I will refer to some of the statements the public safety minister made in his introductory speech on the bill.

One misconception about the bill that has been put forward is that Canadian citizens would be subject to strip searches in a manner that they were not before. The current law allows a U.S. pre-clearance officer to conduct a strip search if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a traveller is hiding something or carrying something dangerous. My colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka said that should there be a wish to explore what “reasonable grounds” means, we certainly could look at it in committee. For that reason, I support the bill going to the committee stage.

The concept of a strip search certainly is not something anyone is excited about having happen, but it is worth pointing out that current law obligates U.S. officers to request that a Canadian counterpart conduct the search. This would remain the same. The only difference under Bill C-23 is that the U.S. officer could conduct the search if no Canadian officer were available, which would be extremely rare, and any such search would be subject to the same legal and constitutional protections that would apply to a search done by a Canadian officer.

In this very rare moment in the House of Commons, I agree with some of the comments put forward by the parliamentary secretary to

the government House leader, in that part of the benefit of the U.S. pre-clearance system is that these searches and these processes would be done on Canadian soil. Therefore, Canadian law and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms would apply to Canadians. To me, this is a win-win.

● (1230)

I am a frequent visitor to the United States of America. My father is an American citizen. I enjoy having pre-clearance. I think this is a piece of legislation that is going to both protect my rights as a citizen of Canada and respect the sovereignty of the United States and its laws. It is going to ensure that the flow of trade, travellers, and goods continues in a positive way.

The Minister of Public Safety said that historical experience over the past 60 years indicates that any conflict in relation to these rules governing searches has “happened exactly zero times”. I think that is important to know. That is a good piece of information.

I am concerned, and certainly there are a lot of people who are concerned right now about some of the changes that have happened under the American administration. I watched a very good interview with officials from the United Nations last night about how, with regard to the safe third country agreement, there have been calls for it to be rescinded. However, the American legal system has not changed overnight. The American asylum system has not changed overnight.

The United States of America is probably one of the most vibrant democracies in the world, with one of the most thriving economies in the world. We are very fortunate to share a border with this country. That does not mean we should not be vigilant in terms of ensuring that Canada's sovereignty is respected, but I really do not see anything in the form or substance of the bill that oversteps that.

Going again through some of the myths about the bill, I know there has been a lot of talk about Canadian citizens being able to be detained by U.S. border officers. The public safety minister stated:

U.S. officers would not have the power to arrest or charge travellers in Canada. Rather, as is currently the case under existing law, a U.S. pre-clearance officer who has reasonable grounds to believe that a traveller has committed an offence must turn the traveller over to Canadian authorities as quickly as possible. With no exceptions, only Canadian authorities would determine whether charges would be laid.

It is very important to note that Canadian law applies in this situation, and at no point in time could the United States all of a sudden supersede our sovereignty and our law in this situation. This is ensuring that our processes are well aligned. Again, I want to emphasize too that there is a choice made by someone who is entering a pre-clearance area or trying to gain entry into the United States. Should there be reasons not to allow people into the United States that they are aware of, that is something they have to be cognizant of when they are choosing to enter another country.

People have written my office to say that under this bill, if they walk into the pre-clearance area, they can no longer choose to leave it. Again, that is a myth. I will have to take the public safety minister's word on this, but I did review the bill. I read the bill the same way he did. He said, “travellers wishing to withdraw from a pre-clearance area...would be entitled to do so, but they would be required to identify themselves and give their reasons for withdrawing”.

Government Orders

The reason given for this change is to ensure that people are not entering the pre-clearance area to case it. I actually agree with this provision. It seems very reasonable. As stated, as the law is written, there would be no ability to simply detain someone ad hoc. People would be able to withdraw, but they would have to give their reasons for doing so.

Arming of officers has also come up. This was the example the minister gave:

...U.S. officers in Canada would only be entitled to carry the same weapons as Canadian border services officers do in the same environment... because Canadian officers do not generally carry firearms inside airport terminals, U.S. officers would not be authorized to carry firearms there either.

The bill would actually expand the pre-clearance process to a variety of other ports and entry points. This is a great thing. The U.S. pre-clearance system in Canada facilitates the flow of goods and services. Certainly as a traveller with family in the United States, this is something I support.

Again, looking at the broader macroeconomic picture of trade and a continued relationship with one of our major trading partners, this is a fantastic continuation of relationships that have continued over political flavours of administrations. In the United States we have seen that change, but also in Canada.

● (1235)

This is a law that shows the endurance of Canadian–American relations in a positive way.

With that, I support this bill.

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for dealing with some of the questions and myths that are circulating. I want to come back to one she mentioned. In my riding of Oakville, the issue of voluntarily withdrawing from the pre-clearance area and the belief that people could be detained and held and put through various searches have come up.

As I believe the member across has said, people would be able to withdraw from the pre-clearance area. The pre-clearance officer would be prohibited from imposing unreasonable delays. However, if the officers suspected that the person was probing to look for weaknesses at the border, they would be able to ask for ID and a reason for the withdrawal. I wonder if the member could elaborate on that point a bit and touch again on some of the myths that are circulating that are not true and that are weakening a very good bill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite raises a good point, especially when it comes to this bill and some of the rhetoric, especially around the change of the administration in the United States. In order for Canada and the United States to continue to have a mutually positive trading relationship, we have to focus on facts and not ramp up the rhetoric, when there really is no need to do so. Frankly, it lessens our ability to critically review serious issues when they do arise.

I have read this bill backward and forward, and I listened to the public safety minister's speech. I have spent a lot of time with my colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka, who is our critic on this file. I followed, when I was in government, the development of the beyond the border agreement. To me, it is very clear that Canadian law supersedes any sort of issue.

I would encourage people who are contacting their MPs on this bill to review some of the speeches of the public safety minister, my colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka, and some of my other colleagues and actually look at the form and substance of the bill itself. In no way would this give any rights to American border agents that would supersede or remove due process or the rights of Canadian citizens on Canadian soil.

● (1240)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a rare day in the House when we agree with the government, and I would like to congratulate the government for completing some of the hard work that was done previously. I was wondering how this would directly affect my hon. colleague's riding.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, certainly the flow of goods and services between Calgary and ports of entry in the United States is significant. Calgary has always had a strong trading relationship, certainly in the energy sector, the forestry sector, and the agriculture sector. I know that there is quite a bit of traffic. If we think of something as simple as air travel, Calgary International Airport has just expanded, and that really highlights the fact that there has been a significant increase in traffic, both from the United States to Canada and vice versa. Therefore, just in that one little microcosm, this is going to be very important.

I have also been heartened to see more travellers from the United States coming to Calgary of late, specifically with regard to the announcement on the KXL pipeline. In the House of Commons, I would like to congratulate the new American president, President Trump, for making a very good decision on Keystone XL. This is going to be a very positive decision for North American energy security and job creation on both sides of the border.

In closing, if I may, it is important for Canadians, as well as Americans, to look at our relationship as something that is beautiful and pragmatic. It should be managed with respect in terms of looking at the facts contained in the bill rather than with hyperbole.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United States is based on the idea that people should be able to pursue life, liberty, and happiness or the enjoyment of their property. I would argue that in Canada it is very similar, if not the exact same.

Our country aligns significantly with our cousin to the south. One of the things that we need in this country is a very thin border with the United States. I can remember crossing back and forth over the American border with no documentation whatsoever. I was a young child back then, so I may not have even had any documentation. I think all my parents needed at that point was a driver's license, and they were across the border. They could come back weeks later, and it was fine.

Now we need to get passports to go to the United States. For me, that has been a significant barrier to going to the United States. I went to the University of the Fraser Valley, in Abbotsford, British Columbia. It is right across the border from Sumas, United States. I boarded in a house within sight of the border. We often crossed the border there.

Government Orders

Since the introduction of passports several years ago, the border lineups have increased dramatically. We see the effects of a thickening border across the country.

This bill works to reduce the thickness of the border. It works to streamline people crossing the border. It also makes it so that people are not running into problems in other countries on their holidays. I have not travelled abroad very often, but on my honeymoon I went to the Middle East and around the Mediterranean. For me, that was always a bit of a worry. We did not get screened and run through the whole border security until we got to the other country. Then, what would happen if we did not have the right documentation or something was out of order? We would have just been shipped back home, and the whole flight and the entire holiday would have been for naught.

The pre-screening, as it has been, and is now being expanded, allows people to have their paperwork checked right here in Canada. If there is in fact something wrong, they can turn around and go home to either get the right documentation or cancel their trip, whatever the case may be. However, they will not be stuck in another country, in limbo, stuck living in airport for an extended period of time.

My riding in northern Alberta, which I like to call the promised land, is a riding that attracts a lot of tourism. One of the things that draws people in is the northern lights. In northern Alberta, the northern lights are spectacular. I would encourage everyone to come and experience the northern lights. During the summer, people will probably not see the northern lights because there is nearly 24 hours of daylight.

The tourism industry is critical to northern Alberta, as it is to all of Canada. I would say that this new bill is going to improve travel to northern Alberta, particularly at a time when the Canadian dollar is worth less than the American dollar. Americans get a discount coming here. For people who are going to go on a holiday and have to choose between Canada and the United States, the Canadian holiday is at a discount. This would really encourage tourism in northern Alberta.

Northern Alberta has some great fishing that brings in a lot of folks from the United States, as well as hunting. I know the guiding and outfitting operations in northern Alberta are extensive. I would encourage anyone who is interested in that to come and check it out. A thinning of the border will make it easier for people travelling to northern Alberta.

In northern Alberta, we have developed some of the most amazing technology and expertise when it comes to oil development. Even in these times of low oil prices, we have been able to transport our technology and expertise around the world.

● (1245)

I have several cousins living in the United States who travel across the border on a regular basis. They have a big oil field company that is now operating all over the world. The ability for them to have the pre-clearance, the NEXUS card, the green card to travel back and forth between Canada and the United States means their quality of life is as good as it has ever been. They are contributing to Canadian society by being able to work around the world, particularly in the

United States. They have big operations down in Colorado and up in Alaska. It is allowing them to take knowledge, expertise, and technology that they developed in northern Alberta, and to bring it to other places that can benefit from these innovations, from their expertise, whether that be in Colorado, or up north in Alaska.

It is a good day when the member for Winnipeg North and I can agree on something. It is a rare opportunity. I appreciate us coming together on something like this, and to see them doing the hard work for which we laid the foundation. It is much appreciated. I was not here in the last Parliament, so I cannot take any credit for it, but I am part of the party that did do that hard work. I know my colleague from Foothills was here, and he can probably attest to the great work that was done previously.

The new locations are going to be welcome here in Canada. Coming from northern Alberta, I use the airport in Edmonton, where we have a pre-clearance facility, which I have used. The border security agents who work there are an intimidating bunch, but they typically make our travels through there quick and efficient. I would expect them to be an intimidating bunch. They are there to protect the border. That is their job. I appreciate the fact that we have Canadian border security agents doing that on behalf of all Canadians every day to ensure that Canadians remain safe. That is an important part. They need to be thanked for their hard work today as well.

Nations are decided by fairly arbitrary lines on the landscape, but it does give us a level of security that we need to protect. It also allows us to have jurisdiction that allows us to create the quality of life we have right here in northern Alberta.

With that, I would like to thank the Liberals for doing such great work on the bill. I did have an opportunity to read through it. I have not seen anything that jumped right out at me. I request the NDP to stop saying the sky is falling, and support the bill as well.

● (1250)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague entirely that tourism is an important part of Canada's economy. My family and I grew up in the tourism industry on the Cabot Trail in Nova Scotia.

However, the change in Bill C-23 is worth a critical examination. We need to be very clear that the pre-clearance that has happened to date has not created concern, but this bill adds additional powers to U.S. security officials on Canadian soil. I have not yet heard a single rationale from anyone who supports Bill C-23 as it now stands, unamended. The member will know how much I like the word "amendment".

The bill, unamended, is not one I can support without what might be described as tweaks or amendments to ensure that anyone attempting to enter the U.S. from Canada in a pre-clearance facility has the absolute right to leave and say, "I'm going back. I'm getting out of this place. I don't want to answer any more of your questions. Thank you very much."

Government Orders

That is not clear in Bill C-23, and that is my concern. Why the change? We have had pre-clearance working just fine without Bill C-23. We can expand it to more airports, to train stations, or whatever. Why on earth do we need to give U.S. agents on Canadian soil more powers?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I will confirm that somewhere on the Internet it does say that amendment is the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands's favourite word in this place.

I was reading through the bill earlier and pre-clearance withdrawal seems clearly laid out. However, I will defer to my colleague on some of these things because she is a lawyer and I am not and lawyers typically trip over words that I find quite benign. From my perspective, it seems logically laid out. If at any time an individual wants to leave the area he or she just has to state the reasons and then leave. That to me seems very logical.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member pointed out, pre-clearance has been taking place for almost six decades and that is a positive thing. Airports in Winnipeg, Halifax, Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Calgary already have pre-clearance and the economic benefits are overwhelming. A person flying out of Toronto airport, for example, without pre-clearance can fly into 20-some U.S. airports. As a result of pre-clearance, a person can fly into 50 U.S. airports.

Could my colleague across the way reinforce the importance of pre-clearance and the benefits for Canada and the U.S. by expanding it?

• (1255)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I did address this extensively in my speech today. It is what I like to call thinning of the border. Pre-clearance makes it easier to cross back and forth across the border and when it is easier, people do it more often and there are benefits from that.

I will outline my most memorable experience with pre-clearance and it happened when I was on my honeymoon. It was not between our country and the United States but between Greece and Israel. I was on a Greek cruise ship which made port in Israel. Officials came by in the morning asking to see our passports. There was a pre-clearance place on the cruise ship so the border security guards went through our passports right on the ship, while we were cruising. When we arrived at port we had already been pre-cleared and could just walk off the ship right on to our tour bus. That made the entire visiting experience that much better. That also drives tourism. If we had gone through the regular channel, all passengers on the ship would have been required to line up at border security point and it could have taken several hours to get through.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Speaker, today I am greatly honoured and proud to speak to this august House regarding Bill C-23. The bill will reflect our combined efforts to maintain and develop the success of our Canadian borders. We understand that security and efficiency goes hand in hand in expediting the legitimate transactions across the border regarding trade and travel.

As the proud member of Parliament representing the riding of Brampton Centre, where many businesses are flourishing day by day, I can see the importance of the preclearance act that would allow travellers and cargo to move quickly and safely across the Canada-U.S. border. When this law comes into force, there will be tremendous job opportunities available to Canadians.

The bill would implement the agreement on land, rail, marine, and air transport pre-clearances between the Government of Canada and the government of the United States.

I wish to remind the House that our American friends passed legislation in December 2016, the promoting travel, commerce, and national security act 2016.

As we know, change is a process, but positive change is an initiative. It is my belief that one cannot do the same things and expect to achieve different results. We must be committed to the continuous reviewing of old and existing system, and seek ways to improve. It is our duty to respond to changing conditions in order to compete with the global economic powers.

Our Prime Minister wants Canada to take advantage of opportunities to grow our businesses by strengthening the long-standing friendship and proven successful trading relationship between Canada and the United States.

This government has recognized that in order for our economy to grow and our societies to develop, we must provide the economic and social atmosphere to encourage businesses to thrive.

It is a known fact that in 2015 Canada exported over \$400 billion worth of goods and \$50 billion in services to the USA. In the tourism industry, 12.5 million overnight travellers accounted for \$35.5 billion worth of Canada's GDP and over 600,000 jobs. Every day, 400,000 travellers cross the Canadian-USA border, along with nearly \$2.5 billion worth of trade. Yes, it happens on a daily basis. This government wants those numbers to increase, so we must look at new and different ways to improve.

Canada and the USA have a history of successful pre-clearance operations that goes back more than 60 years. Every year, 12 million passengers benefit from pre-clearance at eight Canadian airports.

The proposed Bill C-23 will expand pre-clearance privileges to new, busy, and evolving airports, such as Jean Lesage airport in Quebec City, Billy Bishop airport in Toronto, Montreal Central Station, and Rocky Mountaineer in British Columbia. This act would further lay out the foundation for future expansion of sites in Canada.

If pre-clearance did not exist, Toronto Pearson International Airport, for example, could not offer direct flights to almost half of its destinations in the USA because those airports do not have customs and immigration services. With pre-clearance services at Pearson airport, travellers will have direct flights to 50 USA destinations, but otherwise it would be limited to a mere 27 if the pre-clearance services are not available.

Government Orders

●(1300)

Numerous benefits will come from the pre-clearance process, such as reduced delays. A recent polling by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that 36% of members are sceptical of doing business and would think twice about dealing with U.S.A. clients because of the hassle of getting goods across the border. This is unacceptable. We can do better.

Bill C-23 will be excellent for the small business and tourism industries. It will be good for reducing security risks to Canadians from external threats. Bill C-23 will be beneficial for all Canadian travellers for whom time is of the essence, as they will no longer be wasting time unnecessarily at the border. It will help ensure that citizens of both Canada and the United States will continue to benefit from an open and secure border. It will remove barriers that impede trade opportunities.

Canadian law will continue to be applied within dedicated pre-clearance areas and all pre-clearance operations conducted by U.S.A. officers in Canada would require compliance with Canadian laws, such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, and human rights laws.

I know Brampton, the fastest growing city in Canada, will cherish this concept. In my riding of Brampton Centre, thousands of businesses dealing in transportation will be excited to know that this government is looking after their interests. I am sure all Canadian travellers and Canadian business companies will embrace the concept of the pre-clearance process.

As we all know, job creation is the primary stimulus to our economy, and it is our goal to put people to work. Hence I urge every hon. member to support the bill.

●(1305)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in the course of the debate on Bill C-23, I have not had a chance to reflect on an experience I always find troubling. I do not know how many members have ever taken the train from Montreal to New York, but I love doing it. As the train gets to the U.S. border, the U.S. security guards come on board, and it is very clear racial profiling is going on. They pull people off, and we do not see them again. I find that troubling. That is the way it is if we go to another country, we deal with its security, and the way it handles things, but not on Canadian soil.

This is a big difference. When we have pre-clearance on Canadian soil, we want to ensure that no one is subjected to unwarranted harassment, questioning, strip searches, or detention for further questioning. I am very concerned that Bill C-23 does not protect those who are vulnerable. I am quite certain that an older couple that looks prosperous would have no trouble going through pre-clearance. However, I worry about the marginalized, people of colour, the LGBTQ community members, people with political views, and young people who appear to be going to a demonstration.

Is the Liberal government open to amendments on Bill C-23?

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, we all know we have to go through clearance either before the border crossing or after we arrive in another country. However, if a pre-clearance is done before we cross the border and the authorities check everything they are

required to, that will save time and will benefit every individual going through the system.

I also want to emphasize further that any officers who would do the pre-clearances here would follow the laws of our country. They will not be allowed to go beyond the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, and our human rights laws.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech and comments today.

Could he tell us more about the economic and social benefits that Bill C-23 could have for our country?

[*English*]

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, when Bill C-23 passes, it will provide tremendous job opportunities to everyone in Canada. Not only that, but it will be excellent for all small businesses and tourism. It will be better for those whose time is of great essence. If they want to get rid of having to get in the queue, they can simply use their time for other purposes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many individuals travel abroad. When some of them arrive, they are told they will not be allowed to stay, which means they have to return to Canada. With pre-clearance, before those individuals get on the plane, they are authorized to land and not have to go through immigration and customs at the other end.

Would my colleague reinforce how that is positive thing? Pre-clearance is really about that; getting pre-approved prior to travelling. It does not mean anything more than that.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, pre-clearance will benefit those who travel outside of Canada. Pearson airport only has a facility to land. Certain airports in the U.S.A. have customs and immigration services. However, if those services are not available in airports where people will land, they can go through pre-clearance before leaving and can land at U.S. airports as domestic passengers, which will be beneficial to them.

●(1310)

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this topic.

Going back to an earlier comment by my colleague across the way, I regularly take the train to New York, but I do not take it from Canada because there is up to two hours of delay at the border with the Toronto to New York service. I drew this comment from the TripAdvisor website that says, “expect a 2 hour delay each way... You cannot get off the train and you can't use any electronic devices while the customs inspection is taking place. On the way back, we went through it twice: once on the American side and again on the Canadian side.”

Government Orders

This is in an era when people are travelling from London to Paris in two hours. High-speed rail is certainly something that is being considered. Can members imagine a Toronto to New York high-speed train, which one could expect to be about four hours with that kind of equipment, but with a delay of two hours while the customs inspection goes on at the border? This is not a 21st-century attitude.

This year, we marked the 170th anniversary of the Oregon Treaty, which is the agreement between the United States and Great Britain that established the 49th parallel as the boundary between the United States and what would soon be known as Canada. Somewhat later, in 1903, an international tribunal resolved a long-standing dispute in the north on where to draw the border between Canada and Alaska. These two agreements have not only helped to define our physical borders, but they have also helped to write the story of our historic friendship and alliance between our two nations.

In a world where national borders have at times led to conflict and political strife, Canada and the United States have built a relationship that is co-operative, economically prosperous, and one of the most safe and secure in the world. This relationship has been built and strengthened by ordinary Canadians and ordinary Americans, as well as by political leaders in both countries of all political stripes.

I would put into contrast an old black-and-white movie from the 1940s called *Night Train To Trieste*. It went all through Europe on the Orient Express, and the train did not stop. Here we are with two-hour delays at the border between, I would argue, the two friendliest neighbouring countries perhaps in the world; whereas in a place where people were at war in living memory, they were flying across the borders nonstop.

Our shared goals of providing peace, security, and opportunity for our citizens have helped shape who we are and given us a robust foundation on which to build a strong and prosperous future. Among the key issues regularly discussed between our two countries are border travel and security measures, as we continually look for safe ways to make travel and trade easier and more efficient.

Finding ways to reduce delays at our border with the United States and encourage trade and travel are critical. It is because of the integration of the North American economy and the volume of trade that the border handles daily, which is more than \$2 billion a day, as has been mentioned, that effective management is essential to the health of both of our country's economies. It is in everyone's best interest to safely keep business flowing and our borders open to the legitimate movement of goods and people. This is the goal of initiatives like pre-clearance and why it is essential that we move ahead with this legislation. Once the bill is passed, it will provide the legal framework to govern potential expanded pre-clearance in both Canada and the United States in all modes of transportation: land, rail, marine, and air.

It is worth noting again that pre-clearance operations already process 11 million U.S.-bound passengers every year, with some 400 U.S. customs and border protection officers working at eight Canadian airports. These existing operations reduce wait times and airport congestion, and allow for greater predictability in departure and arrival times. They facilitate the interception of threats at the point of departure, and as the Canadian Chamber of Commerce put it, "greatly improve the competitiveness of North American trade".

In a world of closely interconnected economies and rapidly changing threats, nations are recognizing that pre-clearance is an effective way to encourage trade and travel while managing threats before they cross borders. The economic spin-offs have been well detailed and well proven through these many decades of pre-clearance operations at Canadian airports. In fact, pre-clearance is a way of both thinning the border for legitimate trade and travel while enhancing security by facilitating the interception of potential threats before they arrive at the border itself.

● (1315)

Expanded pre-clearance is part of a long and successful tradition of Canada and the United States not only doing business together but doing border security together as well.

Canada and America already co-operate on measures like the Canada-U.S. integrated border enforcement teams, IBETs, multi-agency law enforcement teams that target cross-border criminal activity; the shiprider program in which specially trained and designated RCMP and U.S. Coast Guard officers jointly crew marine vessels and operate on both sides of the international boundary line; and, of course, trusted traveller programs like NEXUS, the free and secure trade program, or FAST, and others that help to keep the border secure while encouraging legitimate border traffic.

All of these measures become more critical in an ever-changing, ever-connected global community. These are the benefits that we can realize with pre-clearance.

At the state visit last March in Washington, D.C., Canada and the United States announced an agreement in principle to begin expanding pre-clearance to four new sites: two airports, Jean Lesage in Quebec City, and Billy Bishop in Toronto; and two rail sites, Montréal Central station, and Rocky Mountaineer in Vancouver. Legislation to implement that agreement in the U.S. was adopted by Congress and signed into law in December with bipartisan support, and the bill before us today will implement the agreement in Canada.

Importantly, Bill C-23 establishes a framework that could one day govern pre-clearance at ports of entry beyond those that were the subject of last spring's agreement in principle. It could also cover other modes of transport as well as pre-clearance of cargo, and it could see Canadian border officers conducting pre-clearance operations in the U.S. for the first time.

All of this is good for travellers, good for businesses, and good for security on both sides of the border. I urge all members to support Bill C-23 and ensure its swift passage. That will enable me to take the train from Toronto to New York without stopping at the Niagara frontier.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very alarming to sit on this side today and hear the lack of understanding about Bill C-23.

Government Orders

I live in a border community. People in my community have family members on the other side. People in my community, on a daily basis, have to commute for work. I understand about pre-clearance. It is working. It exists today. We have pre-clearance. We have a pre-clearance arrangement.

Bill C-23 is about adding additional powers to our U.S. counterparts on Canadian soil. Canadian immigration lawyers are warning us that without amending aspects of this bill, it will be excessive powers.

Do you agree that there will need to be amendments to this bill to ensure that Canadians have rights on Canadian soil when being questioned by U.S. counterparts in customs?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am that sure that the hon. member wanted the opinion of the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek not me, so I will pass it on to him.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, would you care to weigh in on the subject?

I want to assure my colleagues on the other side of the House that the government is fully aware of the concerns of all Canadians and North Americans about security issues. We would not allow legislation to go forward that would add to any threats or any concerns about people travelling between the two countries.

I am confident that the legislation that is before us contemplates all the potential problems and will be an effective measure to expedite and improve the travel of people and goods between the United States and Canada.

• (1320)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I think I have found another train advocate in this place, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I am very pleased to see that.

I agree that pre-clearance before boarding in Montreal or Toronto or Penn Station would be absolutely fantastic. I am not opposed to pre-clearance.

I am opposed to Bill C-23 as it currently stands, because I have yet to hear a single explanation from the government benches as to why we should agree to give U.S. border security guards additional powers that they do not currently have when we go through pre-clearance, for instance, here in Ottawa. I recently went to Washington, D.C. and did my pre-clearance in Ottawa. It all makes good sense. However, why would we give U.S. agents new powers when operating on Canadian soil?

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the current legislation, obviously it will always involve changes in different approaches to how those security clearances take place. In the interests of both Canadian and American officials, we want to have a harmonized bill that satisfies the needs of both countries. Therefore, I am confident that what we have before us does that in a fair and effective way.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the point the members on the other side seem to be missing is that pre-clearance works just fine without these new powers for the American officials to use in Canada. These would include carrying firearms, detention, and conducting strip searches.

Why on earth do we need to add new powers in order to keep pre-clearance operating? There seems to be no justification for that, other than it must have been the price the U.S. demanded for the expanded agreement.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, whatever legislation existed in the past, we are in a brave new world. We have different situations. I would suggest members get a newspaper or watch the news. The world is a different world than the one I grew up in and the one when the *Sleeping Car to Trieste* took place in 1948. We need to review, improve and enhance the approaches that have been taken. I believe the bill before us will do that in a way that Canadians would accept.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did have a really good speech and I was going to praise my colleagues across the floor about working with our party and bringing Bill C-23 to reality. I listened attentively yesterday and today at some of the arguments from the NDP. There is a lot of fear and I do not understand why.

Bill C-23 is an act respecting the pre-clearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States. We have been doing that on and off since about 1952 and our first free trade agreement came into force in 1989. Our countries have been working very well over the last number of years to protect the world's longest undefended border of 8,900 kilometres and that has resulted in a bilateral trade investment relationship that is one of the best in the world.

Bill C-23 would modernize the way our customs officials in Canada and the United States work together. We need to modernize it. As my friend across the way said earlier, times are changing. I remember when I went to the United States and I gave my driver's licence and drove across with no problem. Americans used to drive here across the border with a driver's licence, but times are changing. It is more difficult. There is lots of fearmongering coming from my far left here.

A friend came to Canada on his motorcycle from the United States and he had a mishap in northern British Columbia. We had to send him back by ambulance and airplane to Vancouver to get back to the United States, but he had a really hard time getting back to his own country because he came across with a driver's licence and to fly back he needed more documentation. People always run into difficulties, but there are always two sides to every story.

I get alarmed when people stand here and say they have a constituent who told them they were held up for two hours. Tell us both sides of the story. We have not heard from the officials what took place. Our minister has said that if people have problems to contact him and they will investigate and find out why there were undue delays.

As a police officer for 35 years, if I were doing a roadblock for impaired drivers and a vehicle came up a couple of hundred yards away from me and turned around, I would not be doing my job if I did not send someone to check that vehicle out. Good police officers, good border guards are trained to be suspicious, are trained to pick up key factors, whether it is the flittering of eyes, whether it is the movement of the body, or whatever, we train our people to watch for this. If we do not give them the authority to ask questions, then we are not doing due diligence for the safety of the people in this country.

Private Member's Business

It is only common sense. Members stand in the House and say someone should not be stopped or be detained, but if they walk up to security pre-clearance and quickly turn around and go away, I am going to be suspicious and so should the security guard. If he is Canadian or American, he is protecting the rights of Canadians and Americans travelling back and forth across one of the greatest free borders in the world. We should be proud of what we do between our cousins in the south and ourselves. We have police officers who have been doing this for 50 or 60 years, working on both sides of the border, working together to make things safe, working together to use each other's intelligence.

• (1325)

Let us not hamper them. Let us give them the authority to do their job properly, to make Canada a safer place, and to make it easier for us to transition from Canada to the United States.

The bill makes a lot of common sense. We are going to do it on our turf. The Americans are going to check us out on our turf. We will be protected by Canadian laws on our turf. That only makes common sense. It is a practical, common sense bill that began with Prime Minister Harper and carried through to the current Prime Minister. Canadians need this. We need pre-clearance to get ourselves across the border as quickly and as safely as we can, but we have to ensure our officers have the tools to do their job effectively.

Years ago I used to travel back and forth by aircraft to the United States. It used to take an hour to an hour and a half to get through customs. There is something called CANPASS. It has been in existence since about 1989. CANPASS is pre-clearance. I can go to the United States by air and get through customs in about five minutes. That is what pre-security screening does for people.

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Yellowhead will have another three minutes and 30 seconds remaining in when this is next before the House.

NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-23, an act respecting the pre-clearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): I would like to inform the House that the opposition day designated for Monday, March 6 be undesignated and will now take place on Tuesday, March 7.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

SENIORS

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize that seniors, namely Canadians aged 65 or older, make up a demographic that requires ongoing attention from the government as the proportion of seniors relative to the Canadian population continues to grow (15% in 2015, 25% by 2035); (b) point out that it is working hard to help improve the lives of seniors, from restoring the age of eligibility for Old Age Security, to increasing the guaranteed income supplement for single seniors, to increasing benefits for couples living apart for reasons beyond their control and supporting affordable housing for seniors; (c) ask the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to study and report back to the House on important issues such as increasing income security for vulnerable seniors and ensuring quality of life and equality for all seniors via the development of a National Seniors Strategy; and (d) broaden the mandate of the National Seniors Council to allow it to undertake reviews and analysis on their own initiative and allow for a better representation of the diversity of experience and expertise on seniors, as well as to encourage it, following the study by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities referred to in (c), to provide advice on implementing a National Seniors' Strategy.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak to Canadians about Motion No. 106, my motion calling on the federal government to take action to help improve quality of life for seniors in Canada. I would like to thank the hon. member from King—Vaughan for her excellent work related to seniors issues, and also all my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House for their work toward improving seniors' lives and conditions in Canada. I would also like to thank the hon. Senator Sharon Carstairs for working with me and for reminding me that there are as many ways to age as there are people aging. Seniors should be defined by how they live and not by their age.

Above all, I want to emphasize that we should view the aging population as an opportunity and not an obstacle for Canada to update a wide range of public policy.

• (1335)

[Translation]

I was raised by my father, who had 16 brothers and sisters, and my mother, who had 15 brothers and sisters. They were part of two big Catholic French-Canadian families. I had more than 60 aunts and uncles. I am proud to have grown up in a big, warm family that supported me. Now, my parents, aunts and uncles are all getting older.

I had the pleasure of meeting seniors in their homes and in assisted living centres throughout my riding of Nickel Belt and in Greater Sudbury

Private Member's Business

Many seniors told me that it is becoming increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Doctors, the health system, and Canada's social programs do not meet all their needs. They also told me that they want to be independent and live at home for as long as possible.

[English]

That is why I believe that today's debate on Motion No. 106 is so important and that the aging of Canadian society requires ongoing and serious attention.

By 2035, 25% of the population is projected to be 65 or older, and is expected to account for 60% of health care spending across the provinces and territories. In my mind, there is little doubt that this is unsustainable. That is why Motion No. 106 calls on the government to recognize that improving efficiencies and quality of care for seniors should be a critical priority for the federal government, as the future of Canada's social safety net not just for seniors, but for the entire population is at stake.

Motion No.106 asks the federal government to take action to improve quality of life for seniors. As there are undoubtedly many Canadians who are listening and participating in this debate, I believe the time is now for the federal government and members of Parliament to speak directly to them, to clearly inform Canadians about what the federal government is doing to improve the quality of life for those who are considered seniors now, as well as those who will be considered seniors soon.

Motion No. 106 asks that the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development study the important issues related to the aging of Canadians that will inform the development of a national seniors strategy. That is something that more than 49,000 Canadians have demanded by writing letters to their MPs as part of the Canadian Medical Association's demandplan.ca campaign.

In an August of 2014 *Toronto Star* article, Dr. Chris Simpson, incoming president of the CMA, called seniors' care the most pressing public issue in Canada today. He said, "If we can fix seniors' care, we will go a long way to fixing our health care system."

[Translation]

I think it would be a disservice to Canadians if the House proposed a plan for a national seniors' strategy without consulting them first.

In developing such a strategy, we must consider input from experts, such as academics, caregivers, doctors, members of local and national associations, hospital administrators, seniors residences, as well as the seniors themselves. That is why I am calling on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to conduct a study to inform the development of a national seniors' strategy and during which testimony will help the committee draft its report, make recommendations, and determine what such a strategy should focus on.

● (1340)

[English]

I will, however, suggest six sectors in the continuum of care that the development of a national seniors strategy should seek to address.

The first sector is wellness and prevention. A national seniors strategy should highlight best practices for improving the social detriments for seniors. There are conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age such as secure income, stable and affordable housing, social connections, and active lifestyles. In doing so, we will reduce the strain on seniors seeking acute care at hospitals.

The second sector that the national strategy for seniors should address is primary care. Primary care can be defined as highlighting best practices for integrating primary and specialist care, facilitating greater availability of advanced training in aging and palliative care, and building knowledge of how to facilitate advanced care planning, including fraud and injury prevention, health promotion, illness, and chronic health concerns. At the same time, more than half of our seniors claim that they take five or more drugs from different classes, and 20% of seniors reported that no medical practitioner had reviewed their medication regime in over a year. The lack of integration among health care systems causes real strain on the health care system, and the CMA reports that between 2006 and 2011 there were almost 140,000 hospitalizations for adverse drug reactions for seniors in Canada.

The third, and perhaps most important, national seniors strategy sector should focus on home care and community support. According to CMA, caring for seniors at home and in their community as opposed to in hospitals is one of the most cost-effective ways that our health care system can meet the needs of seniors who are not fully experiencing Alzheimer's or dementia or who are not critically ill. Clearly, a national seniors strategy should focus on developing and implementing policies and best practices that encourage treating seniors in their homes and enabling seniors to live in their communities as long as possible. This is something that nine out of 10 seniors have said is of critical importance to them. Home care is also the most cost effective and is what seniors want themselves. The 2009 Senate report on aging, tabled by Senators Carstairs and Keon, notes that family and friends provide about 80% of all home care to seniors living in a community and up to 30% of services to seniors living in institutions. A national seniors strategy should pave the way for a comprehensive plan for families and caregivers that takes into consideration the financial needs of family members as well as of caregivers who provide home care, and the stress and financial burden that they take on as a result.

[Translation]

The fourth sector the national seniors' strategy should address is short-term care and specialized care that is generally provided in hospital settings and usually in the form of a short stay to treat serious conditions.

More patients will be receiving what is called "alternate level of care" as the population ages and more Canadians seek access to home care or long-term care.

Private Member's Business

The national seniors' strategy could focus on the federal government's role in reducing wait times for seniors who need to see specialists and ensuring better coordination between levels of care so that those people would not be stuck in a hospital bed receiving alternate level of care while they wait for a transfer to a long-term care facility or back home.

The fifth sector the national seniors' strategy should tackle is long-term care. Most seniors who live in long-term care facilities have cognitive issues. Their physical health has declined, and they have trouble doing day-to-day tasks.

We need to prepare for a dramatic increase in demand in this sector. I think the best way for the federal government to meet those needs is to invest more in affordable, adequate housing with a special focus on the co-operative sector.

• (1345)

[*English*]

Lastly, the sixth sector that a national senior strategy should study is palliative care. According to CMA, starting palliative care early combined with medical treatment provides better pain and symptom management, better patient and family satisfaction, and the increased likelihood that a patient will pass away in a preferred setting.

A national seniors strategy could look at ways for the federal government to make palliative care more affordable and more accessible to people living in remote and rural areas. It could look at how to provide greater access to palliative care for those with disabilities and members of indigenous communities, and how to provide greater support for family caregivers who are so essential for the delivery of palliative care to their loved ones.

Now I would like to briefly go over why Motion No. 106 calls for the mandate of the National Seniors Council to be broadened. My motion asks the federal government to broaden the mandate of the National Seniors Council to allow it to better reflect the diversity and expertise among its members.

Currently, the National Seniors Council has a mandate to undertake extensive research, convene expert panels and round tables, and hold meetings to provide advice to the federal government, but only on as needed basis at the direction of the minister.

Motion No. 106 seeks to empower the National Seniors Council by broadening its mandate to determine research priorities and projects of its own initiative, where in the past it was directed by the minister to conduct research without any consultation from the council.

Broadening the mandate of the National Seniors Council would, in essence, enable it to conduct timely and relevant research for the federal government, and in doing so, enable policy-makers to set budgets, craft legislation, and plan for the future with better research and data to back up their decisions.

As my first private member's bill, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Nickel Belt for their trust. I would also like to thank my lovely wife, who is here today, for all her support, and wish her a happy birthday for Monday.

Also, I would also like to give big thanks to my hard-working staff, Anne, James, Rebecca, Janik, Stephanie, Kim, and Sheri. I thank them so much for their dedication and devotion.

Lastly, I ask all Canadians to reach out to seniors. I would ask them to take the extra time, volunteer, and reach out to seniors who have built this wonderful country.

I ask all MPs to support Motion No. 106. It is the start of an important conversation to improve the quality of life of all seniors living in Canada.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the way for picking an excellent subject for his private member's bill.

In my riding of Sarnia—Lambton, the average age is 54, so seniors are a huge priority. We see the great need for long-term care and many of the services that my colleague highlighted. I most especially liked the part about palliative care of course, because that was the subject of my private member's bill that came forward in the House.

Could the member opposite tell us what the government intends to do to come alongside with the infrastructure needed to support long-term care and palliative care and some of the things in the bill?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and for her hard work on palliative care. It is so important to the Canadian senior population across Canada.

Budget 2016 has looked at infrastructure dollars related to seniors homes, affordable housing, and is also looking at the need for palliative service.

The motion would provide the committee on human resources and the Seniors Council with an opportunity to reach out to palliative care, to continue the work that Senator Carstairs has been doing, even today, on palliative care, and to develop a national strategy that will look at bringing all services to seniors and this important issue on palliative care.

We are looking forward to the members' debate. As part of this process, we are looking at all Canadians to participate in the debate and participate in palliative care services directly.

• (1350)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Nickel Belt for bringing forth this motion.

I have two questions for the member, which centre on courses of action. The Liberal government made a promise to introduce a seniors price index. Here we are, more than a year forward, and we still have not seen that. My first question is on whether the member is concerned that the government has not lived up to this promise yet.

My second question is about the child rearing and disability provisions in CPP legislation, the dropout provisions. Those were missing from the CPP enhancements that we saw earlier this year. Will the member raise this issue with his government and ask the minister to fix that part of the CPP?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and for the hard work he and his party have done for seniors since he has been in Parliament.

He brings up an important point. Part of the motion is establishing and empowering the Seniors Council. It is important to provide feedback, and I would encourage the member to provide the feedback, provide situations that we could look at that are related to this issue.

Our government has been committed to seniors. We have lowered the old age security to 65. We have increased the GIS by 10%. We have also enhanced the CPP. This is an opportunity for all members and the Canadian population to participate in this debate, to finalize, provide action, and also bring forward these issues that are important to the committee and to the seniors council. They should focus on bringing these issues and these recommendations to a plan of action on developing a national seniors strategy.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his research leading up to Motion No. 106. We are all very glad to have heard his speech on the motion today.

Can my hon. colleague comment further on the benefits of a national seniors' strategy?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

We worked with a number of national partners and organizations, as well as with the provinces, to determine what benefits a national seniors' strategy could have. We also reviewed the services that the federal government offers seniors.

Giving the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities the mandate to conduct research and hear from witnesses from across Canada is therefore an important aspect of the motion. It is also vital that the seniors' council get information from across the country.

Finally, as I already mentioned, the demandplan.ca website gives Canadians the opportunity to participate in the debate on the development of a meaningful national strategy for seniors.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to speak to Motion No. 106, the Liberal motion on seniors. I emphasize the word "Liberal" because this motion is just another example of the Liberals putting forward empty, feel-good and, frankly, do-nothing motions. I am sure the member had good intentions behind the motion. He has given it a very grandiose title, "establishing a national seniors' strategy". Someone reading it might actually think it had teeth or represented actually helping seniors.

Private Member's Business

Here is the problem, though. Motion No. 106 does nothing but highlight the lack of seriousness that the Liberal government has when it comes to addressing the needs of seniors.

The superficial nature of the motion is disrespectful at its core, because it makes light of a serious issue by failing to provide any concrete language or measurable outcomes. Hard-working Canadian seniors deserve a concrete commitment and timeline from the government regarding the development of a national seniors' framework.

I want to highlight a couple of items in the motion.

Number one is to "recognize that seniors...make up a demographic that requires ongoing attention". It seems a bit obvious.

Number two is that the government should "point out that it is working hard to [improve] the lives of seniors". Here we have a motion from the Liberal government saying we should point out the great job we are doing for seniors.

Motion No. 106 is frustrating for its lack of tangible outcomes. It is even more frustrating that it comes after several attempts to help seniors from members on this side of the House that were rejected outright by the Liberal majority, pretty much for the reason that it was not their idea.

We have asked for a return of the ministry for seniors and a real, concrete national seniors' strategy over and over again. My colleagues, the member for Langley—Aldergrove and the member for Richmond Centre, and I have personally submitted numerous petitions asking for reinstatement of the ministry for seniors, which existed before being cynically cut by the current government.

My own private member's bill, Bill C-301, the RRIF financial security act, focused on tax relief for Canadian seniors.

The bill was supported by the NDP, by financial experts who provided clear evidence that the bill would help seniors without hurting government revenues, by the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and most important, by Canadians across the country. With broad support from Canadians, one would expect that this would be reflected in this House. However, the Liberals, including the member for Nickel Belt, voted against seniors and against that bill.

On February 14, Liberal members of the HUMA standing committee voted down a neutral motion calling for the committee to study seniors' issues. They just recently voted down a motion asking for a study of seniors' issues; yet, here we are, days later, discussing a Liberal motion on seniors. It makes me wonder why the government has so suddenly changed its mind. Is it because the government is so politically motivated it cannot see the benefit of voting in favour of an opposition motion?

The Conservatives have a long record of supporting our seniors. There are accomplishments that we are proud of, and accomplishments that are being eroded thanks to the reckless tax-and-spend approach of the current Liberal government.

Private Member's Business

Our seniors have worked all their lives, paid taxes, paid into pensions, and paid into the CPP. They are trying to live out their golden years with a living wage and savings to prepare them for unanticipated expenses.

Conservative policies focused on empowering seniors to choose how they want to live their retirement years and providing help for those who need it. We expanded the GIS and the compassionate care program, and provided tax breaks to caregivers. We invested \$1.4 billion in 2011 to reduce the number of Canadians in a housing need through a federal-provincial framework assisting almost 184,000 homes. We invested \$1.25 billion in the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's affordable housing centre, creating over 25,000 new affordable housing units.

We introduced tax-free savings accounts and expanded the annual maximum to \$10,000 to help working Canadians save more for their retirement. Millions of Canadians use TFSAs, with the vast majority earning low and middle incomes. Yet the Liberals could not wait to reduce the TFSA limit and punish those who dared think that hard-earned and saved money should be enjoyed by those who earned and saved it.

The previous government introduced income splitting for seniors and lowered the mandatory withdrawal rate for registered retirement income funds.

It is a long record indeed. These are evidence-based policies that benefit every senior, with remarkable returns leading to the lowest poverty rate among our seniors in decades. It is a record to be proud of. However, more can always be done. The previous government dedicated an entire ministry to helping seniors. Unfortunately, the Liberals scrapped the ministry and currently have no cabinet representation for seniors.

• (1355)

We have a minister of youth, who I will note sits and refuses to answer questions posed to the minister of youth, but nothing for our seniors who have spent decades working and paying taxes. That was another in a long line of inexplicable Liberal decisions.

Both my party and my colleagues in the other opposition parties bring forward initiatives to help seniors, to lower taxes, and to provide relief for the vulnerable in Canada. I do not always agree with my NDP colleagues, but I happily support any sensible ideas they put forward to help Canadians. However, in response, the government consistently votes against them and blocks them from coming into force for what I can only assume are crass political motivations.

The problem is that although the Liberals might score a political win, vulnerable Canadians who need our help lose. These Canadians lose because the government would rather play politics than support something they did not come up with first.

It is no surprise to anyone that our population mix is changing drastically. One in six Canadians was a senior last year. In 12 years, one in four Canadians will be a senior. There are now more Canadians 65 years of age or older than those under the age of 15. The ratio of workers to seniors is going to fall from 4:1 to 2:1 in 2030.

This drastic demographic shift has created an important need to prepare for the care of aging Canadians, changing program priorities, and government delivery. This is not just a concern for old age security but for the future of our health care system, and how the provinces are to cope with the massive growth in seniors who will be accessing the already overloaded health care system. An assessment of government readiness to care for an aging population needs to begin now.

I want to go back to Bill C-301, about which I briefly spoke. It was an immediate solution to help seniors today and in the future, and was broadly supported. It was not just empty rhetoric and talking points. I received hundreds of responses from Edmontonians who were counting on the current Liberal government to remove the mandatory withdrawal structure from the RRIFs. I have correspondence from seniors in Toronto, Ottawa, all over British Columbia, and Calgary, all supporting removing mandatory minimums. I have an endorsement from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, representing over 60,000 seniors, in support of removing mandatory withdrawals. However, I suppose this was not a Liberal initiative and therefore was not worthy of this Parliament.

I can go on and on about the conduct of the members on the other side of the House, pretending to stand up for middle-class Canadians. Middle-class Canadians do not want taxes, or corporate bailouts, or long-winded talking points. They want jobs and they want to see the money that they put into the government coming back to them. In the case of seniors, they want assurances that the system they have been paying into is there to help them when they need it.

It is getting more difficult by the day to believe anything the government says in the House. It constantly boasts about wanting to be collaborative, looking toward the future, and changing the way things work in this place. Then it does the exact opposite of what it preaches.

I support evidence-based policies that meaningfully help our most vulnerable. However, I do not support Liberal moves of cynical, self-congratulation to cover up the fact they have voted down every proposal we or my opposition colleagues have brought forward simply because of where we sit in the House. I also do not support empty, do-nothing motions that will not help seniors today or in the future.

• (1400)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate having the opportunity to debate Motion No. 106 today, which is brought by the member for Nickel Belt. Indeed, I am happy to speak on any motion with an ultimate goal of improving the lives of seniors.

I think it is crucial that we have a senior strategy put in place immediately. This is an issue that we have been talking about for many years, not only the 42nd Parliament, but the 41st Parliament, the 40th Parliament, and so on. We have talked about a national senior strategy ad nauseam. I am worried. The time for action has come, but all we seem to do is talk about it.

Private Member's Business

We need to deal with the growing senior population. I know from first-hand experience in my own riding, which I am sure many members can reiterate, that we see seniors within our constituencies who are struggling to make ends meet today. Therefore, I am proud to be a member of a caucus and a party that has a long tradition and history of bringing forward a thoughtful and strategic approach to seniors care.

The member for Nickel Belt, in his motion, correctly identifies the demographic shifts that are going on in Canada. We know that our population is aging rapidly, and we know that for the first time there are more people age 65 than there are children under the age of 14. By 2036, just two decades away, it is expected that seniors are going to make up 25% of the population. The fastest-growing age group are people who are 85 years and above. Indeed, the population of seniors is expected to double in those two decades. This is very much a demographic time bomb that is heading our way. The more we can do in these initial years, in fact immediately, the better, otherwise future governments will be struggling to keep pace with the changes that will be needed. We know that in the last 25 years, the proportion of this population grew by over 130%.

With these shocking statistics, it is clear that Canada's health care and social system is not designed to meet the challenge. I do not want to give the impression that these are just future problems because these are happening right now. I recall a time when I served as a constituency assistant to a former member of Parliament for seven years, and many of the clientele I helped directly were seniors.

Seniors face a multitude of issues, such as financial, health, housing, social inclusivity, and so on. Indeed, they are quite a varied group, but they are a vulnerable part of society. They certainly deserve our respect for building Canada into the country it is today. I believe that every Canadian, no matter what their social or economic status, should be able to retire in dignity. I think that is a sacred obligation that we have as members of Parliament in the House, and we have the privileges and rights in the House to make sure that we fulfill that obligation.

Our health care system was initially designed to deal with the acute and episodic care of a younger population. Indeed, that is one of the reasons it is struggling today to properly care for patients who are elderly.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the hard work of my colleague for London—Fanshawe, who in the previous Parliament developed a national strategy on aging. One of the big quotes from several years ago pointed out that there are only 242 certified geriatricians in Canada. It is estimated that we need around 700, but we are currently only filling those spots by 15 to 25 a year. Therefore, this is certainly an area where Canada needs to see some action.

It has been reported that about 75% to 80% of Canadian seniors have one or more chronic conditions. The differences are stark when we look at gender. Canadian female seniors are twice as likely to live in poverty as male seniors. It is estimated that 30% of older Canadian women are living below the poverty line. We certainly believe on this side of the House that a national strategy should not only focus on improving the lives of seniors, but also removing that very stark inequality between older women and men.

● (1405)

A 2010 report outlines that approximately 50% of older Atlantic Canadians spend 30% of their income on housing, while 20% spend over 40% of their income on housing, which makes them the most financially vulnerable individuals in Canada.

One of the big concerns that we have in Canada, it being a federation of provinces, is that we have this patchwork quilt of standards, and where people are in Canada determines how well they fare. One of the strengths of the federal government is that it can reach out and make sure that those strong national standards are in place. I would urge the governing members to really use that federal power to make sure that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, and that no matter they live, they have the same standards.

I mentioned my colleague from London—Fanshawe and the important work that she has done on the national strategy on aging in a previous Parliament. She does have a motion in the House, on the Order Paper, known as Motion No. 21. She has worked with stakeholders over the years to create a national strategy. The main components are focusing on health care, affordable housing, income security, and quality of life, but also focuses on creating a seniors advocate.

We already have a seniors advocate in British Columbia, Isobel Mackenzie. She has been great at issuing reports for the Province of British Columbia that outline the key facts and figures, and lay bare the holes that exist in government policy. I think such a policy created at a national level could only do good.

All MPs in this House believe that seniors have worked very hard to build a society of prosperity, generosity, and sound institutions, and that even after retirement they continue to make valuable contributions to our society. I know many recently retired seniors I talk to tell me that they do not know how they even had time to hold a job because they are so involved and so busy in their community. With the volunteer hours they put in and the way they provide that mentoring to a younger generation, they really do form that bedrock for many communities across Canada.

Due to the role seniors continue to play in Canada, we owe them that debt of responsibility to continue to make sure that no one is growing old in poverty, insecurity, or indeed in isolation.

This motion before us is a call to action for further study, but as I outlined in my introductory remarks, I worry that this is an issue that gets studied to death. I really want to see some action. Previously, I asked the member for Nickel Belt what had happened to the government's promise for the creation of a seniors price index. We are more than a year into it, and we still do not have those costs dealing with seniors incomes, old age security, and guaranteed income supplement. We still do not have word from the government on what is going to be happening to those all-important missing drop-out provisions for the child-rearing years and those times when Canadian seniors might have had a disability. Those are big, gaping holes.

Private Member's Business

Overall, we do support the intent of the motion. However, I would hope that the member for Nickel Belt, maybe during the second hour of debate, would be amenable to some kind of an amendment to his motion, something to include the recognition that much more work needs to be done, and that all seniors need to live and retire in dignity.

I think we need to have wording in the motion that acknowledges the importance of the social determinants of health, and how we institute more preventative medicine and the prevention of illnesses and disabilities and all the ailments that come with old age. A national pharmacare plan, the affordable housing component, and of course the creation of that seniors advocacy position need to be included.

I will conclude my remarks by thanking the member for Nickel Belt. I know his heart is in the right place. I certainly hope that, in consultation with him, during the second hour of debate he might be amenable to changing the wording of this motion so that we acknowledge those important factors I just listed. I appreciate the opportunity to give voice to this important issue.

• (1410)

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to Motion No. 106, a motion encouraging the government to develop a national seniors strategy, brought forward by my colleague from Nickel Belt. I want to thank him very much for his dedicated work on this issue.

The motion encourages the government to take specific actions to address seniors issues. As chair of the seniors Liberal caucus, I am delighted that this motion is coming forward and I want to give my full support.

Wherever we live, whatever our political inclination, we all grow old. At least we aspire to grow old with dignity and physical well-being. With aging an inevitable part of our common humanity, there surely can be few areas of government activity more able to positively impact Canadians.

Given the potential impact, we need to proceed with sound, strategic planning and with a whole of government approach. The motion asks the government to do four key things: to recognize that seniors make up a demographic that requires ongoing attention from the government; to confirm that the government is working to improve the lives of seniors; to ask the Standing Committee of Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, also known as HUMA, to study and report back to the House on the development of a National Seniors Strategy; and to broaden the mandate of the National Seniors Council.

Today I would like to express why the government is in support of the motion.

The Government of Canada recognizes that, like many countries around the world, Canada's population is aging. We know that the proportion of the senior population, age 65 and older, has been increasing steadily over the past 40 years. From 1971 to 2011, the proportion of seniors in Canada's population grew from 8% to 14%. I know members have heard all this before.

According to demographic projections, seniors could represent between 23% and 25% of the total population in 2036. In 2015, the number of seniors exceeded the number of children age 14 and younger for the first time ever. This shift is in part due to increasing an lifespan for Canadians, which is something that should be celebrated.

At the same time, we must be thoughtful in how we respond to the opportunities and policy challenges before us.

I want to assure members that our government values the contributions that older Canadians have made, and continue to make, to our communities, our workplaces, and our families.

Supporting Motion No. 106 is an opportunity to look at the challenges and opportunities faced by older Canadians and to recognize the rich diversity of seniors, for example, indigenous seniors, LGBTQ2 seniors, older immigrants and refugees, and seniors with disabilities. We are committed to the full social and economic inclusion of all Canadians. Our government looks forward to continuing to work together with other key stakeholders to support Canada's seniors of today and tomorrow.

Our government believes that older Canadians are and will continue to be among the drivers of our economy. The seniors of today are living longer, healthier lives than those of previous generations. Just think about the Canadian workforce.

Today many baby boomers choose to stay in the workforce even after the traditional retirement age of 65. Some stay for financial reasons, others because they want to remain active and engaged. According to a Statistics Canada survey of older workers, over half of the respondents who are currently working have indicated a plan to continue working on a part-time basis when they retire.

Not only is there room for seniors in the labour market, we require their skills, knowledge, and their contributions to ensure continued prosperity of our workforce and of our economy. Older workers can enable the successful transfer of an organization's knowledge, skills, and experience to future leaders and to areas that require specialized expertise. They also tend to remain with employers for longer periods. That means fewer costs for hiring and training new staff.

I am talking about older workers here to give an example of just one of the many contributions that older Canadians make to our society. After a working lifetime of contributing to Canada, Canada needs to ensure the needs of older Canadians are met with dignity and respect, and as an integral part of a social contract between all Canadians. Some will say developing an effective strategy to assist the elderly is about fairness. That is true, but the impetus for developing a national seniors strategy is more far-reaching. Canadians of all ages benefit when we respond to the needs of the elderly in a coherent, comprehensive, and effective manner.

Private Member's Business

•(1415)

Youth are likely to receive the guidance and insight of their grandparents for longer periods. Middle-aged adults may face less of a squeeze when juggling work, raising children, and helping their elderly parents. Those approaching retirement age can make sound decisions, knowing that assistance is available for their essential needs should they need it in the coming decades.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, this is who we are as a nation. We value all Canadians equally, whatever their situation, whatever their age, and we do so because it is fair and just. It seems that the essential needs of seniors are not fundamentally different from the rest of the population: accessible and supportive health services, affordable and suitable housing, financial security, and being treated with dignity and respect.

Of course, the situation seniors face, the intensity of their demands for some of these needs, and especially how seniors can best meet these needs differs from young people. At their core, however, they are essentially the same. However, as we experience population aging, the support our government provides and how we deliver it needs to evolve.

With an aging population, we know that there are challenges. The issues are complex in nature. They require collaboration across all of government and with non-governmental and private sector partners, researchers, practitioners, organizations representing seniors, and of course, seniors themselves. We must base our decisions on evidence and the lived experience of our seniors. We know that, and we understand that.

Our government is already responding to an aging population and demonstrating its commitment to seniors. We are making investments to enable seniors to live healthy, active, and independent lives. We increased the guaranteed income supplement top-up for single seniors. We are lifting Canadians out of poverty. We are helping seniors face challenges in accessing affordable housing. We restored the age of eligibility for the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement to age 65 from age 67. On top of that, we have enhanced the Canada pension plan for future seniors.

We are also providing additional targeted funding to support improved home care and mental health, which we know will improve outcomes and is the most cost-effective way to deliver much-needed services for seniors. We have also been working to provide more generous and flexible leave for caregivers, and we look forward to implementing further measures to ensure well-being and a good quality of life for seniors.

As we consider the opportunities and challenges associated with an aging population, our government looks forward to receiving advice and recommendations from the National Seniors Council and from the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Motion No. 106 will help us move forward with our work, and for that reason, we must support it.

In conclusion, I want to recognize the hard work of many of the members in the House on this important file. I will not call them out, but there are many people working and bringing forward recommendations across the spectrum that impact seniors' lives,

and I really appreciate all of that hard work on both sides of the House.

Speaking of playing politics, which we heard in a previous declaration here today, this is a sad thing to be saying as we are talking about this motion. However, what I have been seeing is that repeatedly, we have had the official opposition bring forward motions that intend to usurp private members' motions that have already been tabled. To address the one that was mentioned in the speech, it was tabled, in this case, on December 6, 2016.

It is really not respectful behaviour, or efficient for the House, to be doing this kind of activity. If we know that there is a motion coming forward from one side, it really is not appropriate for the other side to try to jump in ahead with an opposition day motion. That is why this side of the House is trying to be respectful and considerate of the hard work individual members are doing through their private member's motions.

•(1420)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, will have approximately seven minutes, at which point she will have to cut, then the next time this motion comes up for debate, she will have another three minutes coming to her.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to change the way I was going to give my speech, because there were certain things that I was going to talk about last.

The first thing I want to respond to is the previous member's comments. Because it is on the record that the Conservative Party put forward a motion, members had better know what we are talking about when we say things such as that the Conservatives put through a counter motion. What actually happened, and I know the chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities is aware of it as well, is that on March 22, 2016, there was a motion. If we are going to say that we are playing politics, let us make sure we have our facts straight.

On March 22, 2016, the member for Langley—Aldergrove brought forward a motion in the HUMA committee. Being honest about this, because it is important that we have these discussions, I looked at the motion and saw a great deal of provincial jurisdiction. As a federal member of Parliament, it is very difficult for me to look at a motion and see that a study is going to be 80% provincial. Therefore, I played around with that motion in committee on February 14 and reintroduced it.

Private Member's Business

Let us be fair and put on the record that Conservatives were not playing politics with this and that our motion was introduced nine months previous to this motion. I want to clarify that. If we are going to talk about playing politics, let us be real. This was not a political move because seniors are very important to the Conservative Party. My riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London at one time had one of the largest populations of seniors in Ontario. I recognize how important they are and that it is a growing demographic.

I am going to talk about the importance of seniors. I believe that I bring a lot of experience to the House in dealing with everyday seniors, whether it is filling out old age security applications, dealing with the GIS, or doing voluntary tax returns for 10 years. There are a lot of things we can do as federal legislators to help seniors, important things like income splitting. That has had a great and positive impact for seniors.

Another great example of what the Conservative government improved on was the age for OAS. From my experience in doing tax returns, usually \$12,000 is the basic income, and from there it is added on. That age amount allowed seniors, many times, to go from about \$12,000 to almost \$18,000. The first \$18,000 was not taxed. I am going to remind people that the guaranteed income supplement is not a taxable amount, so that is not part of the old age security and CPP that is taxed.

We need to look at what federal legislatures can do. When it comes to seniors, we can make sure there are proper tax credits. I appreciate the tax credits that seniors currently have and can only ask that we continue to do more of that, that we continue to look at what more we can do for seniors in that respect. Another thing is making sure that there are the right vehicles to allow seniors to save.

We all know that in the 2015 election, there was so much talk about old age security. There were some misnomers and then there were some truths. One of the truths is that my oldest sister Linda was born in 1962. She will be happy that I said that. The fact is that her age group was going to be the first to be affected by the increase in retirement age from 65 to 67. We are not talking about the seniors of today; we are talking about the seniors of tomorrow. I felt that we were allowing seniors to prepare for their future. We put in vehicles like the tax-free savings account that would allow people to prepare.

My sister is going to be 54 on May 12 and will be retiring in 11 years. Age 65 is when she was going to receive her old age security. It was changed in 2012 or so, to age 67, and the change was going to give her almost 15 years to prepare for her retirement. The Liberals changed that back to age 65.

The finance council has been established, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development will not be taking the advice of this council to increase the age from 65 to 67, although we see that 23 out of the 32 OECD countries are doing so. They are doing so because they recognize that there is an aging demographic and people are living longer.

• (1425)

When old age security was brought forward it was not in a time when people were living 10 and 12 years longer, as they are doing now.

We also have to recognize that we have many other great benefits, our health care, and every day we turn a page we find new scientific adventures and there is better health care. As my friend sitting beside me today said, there are great initiatives like Bill C-277, our framework for palliative care policies. We are putting forward strategies that can work, and we need to do those things.

I have to say that I would have preferred that the member for Nickelback had not put in section B—

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Nickelback? Nickel Belt.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I mean the member for Nickelback, who is really from Nickel Belt, but loves Nickelback.

The fact is, we should not be sitting here and putting in a motion that says, yea, look how great we are. I think that is the one thing out of this entire motion that I find extremely frivolous. I respect the member a great deal, but I think that is a way of creating partisan politics right there. Maybe he could have done a little bit better. Maybe he is willing to amend that on my behalf because he knows I am not really good with that one.

Let us go back to old age security. We will have an aging population. One out of four of our seniors will be over the age of 65 by 2030. This will cost our government between \$10.4 billion and \$11.2 billion. Those were just rough estimates that were done when the previous government looked at those calculations.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member will have three minutes remaining when this motion comes before the House again.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

Private Member's Business

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday,
March 6, 2017, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and
24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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