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Monday, May 8, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 8, 2017

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. As members know, many of our fellow Canadians have been affected by flooding in several parts of the country. Obviously, we stand in solidarity with the flood victims.

[*English*]

Locally, many residents of the National Capital Region are affected, directly or indirectly. As a result, and due to the measures taken by the local authorities, many of our staff will not be able to come to work today. The House administration will thus be operating with reduced staff. Every effort will be made to reduce the impacts on normal operations, but members may notice the effects of this unusual situation.

Obviously this will not affect the operations of the House and its committees, which will operate as normal.

[*Translation*]

I thank members for their understanding and, on behalf of the House, I would like to send a word of encouragement to those who are dealing with the flooding.

It being 11:05 a.m., the House will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC) moved that Bill C-338, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (punishment), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address a serious issue that is destroying lives and causing thousands of deaths in Canada each year. The importing and exporting of dangerous drugs and substances is a serious threat to Canadians. While the Liberal government has taken some constructive steps to combat the threat posed by the trafficking of lethal drugs and substances, little has been done to deter or to punish criminals. I therefore have introduced

Bill C-338, which 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.

Bill C-338 indicates that if the subject matter of the offence is a substance included in schedule I and in an amount that is not more than one kilogram, or is in schedule II, the offender is guilty of an indictable offence and liable for imprisonment for life and to a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of two years.

The proposed bill also specifies that if the subject matter of the offence is a substance included in schedule I and is in an amount that is more than one kilogram, the offender is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable for imprisonment for life and a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of three years.

At present, minimum sentences stand at one year for less than one kilogram and two years for more than one kilogram. This is unacceptable. Such light punishment does not deter drug traffickers from continuing to import and export and profit at the expense of society's most vulnerable. The reality is that criminals who import and export deadly drugs and substances are responsible for thousands of lost lives.

Canadian families expect safe and healthy communities in which to raise their children. Canadians are especially concerned about crime, which is why our previous Conservative government introduced and passed more than 30 measures aiming at the strengthening of our justice system and standing up for victims and keeping our streets safe. We also specifically targeted gangs and other criminal organizations by introducing tougher sentences for drug traffickers who exploit the addictions of others for personal profit.

Canadians lose faith in the criminal justice system when they feel that the punishment does not fit the crime. Elected representatives can and should provide guidance on sentences to reflect the view of all Canadians. The Conservatives make no apologies for strengthening penalties for drug traffickers or other crimes. All parliamentarians must ensure that sentencing reflects Canadians' desire to get tough on drug dealers and on other criminals.

Private Members' Business

Over the past five years, we have seen a deeply disturbing spike in overdoses involving the synthetic opioid painkiller fentanyl. It is so strong that exposure to a microgram is often fatal. Just to put that into perspective, a microgram is what one would get who took a standard 400-milligram pill of ibuprofen and cut it into 4,000 pieces. That tiny grain of drug may kill someone who comes in contact with it. Prescription-grade fentanyl is up to 100 times more toxic than morphine. It is often used as a last-resort painkiller to treat terminally ill cancer patients. It is especially dangerous if one has never been exposed to opiates before.

● (1110)

In Canada, drug dealers can order the illegal substances for drug production online from overseas suppliers, many of whom will guarantee reshipment in the event that the package is intercepted. The drug is then produced in basement labs and kitchens, but in such conditions that it is impossible to predict the strength of each dose. Earlier this year, in my riding of Markham—Unionville, a drug lab was discovered in the heart of an upper-middle-class residential neighbourhood, forcing residents to evacuate their homes.

For people who are looking to abuse the drug, fentanyl creates a blissful feeling similar to the effects of heroin, but an overdose shuts down the area of the brain that controls breathing. This generally results in brain damage or death.

Many people end up taking fentanyl accidentally. Drug producers are lacing other drugs with fentanyl, and the users have no idea that what they are buying will kill them. Unsuspecting drug addicts might buy what they think is OxyContin, but it is actually fentanyl, or a young student who may be experimenting at a party may end up overdosing on fentanyl. The user is not expecting difficulty in breathing and a slowed heartbeat.

It is not only hard-core drug addicts and junkies who are victims of this epidemic. It is regular people, such as Jack Bodie, a 17-year-old Vancouverite, who died in a park after taking fake OxyContin pills with his younger friend. It is 33-year-old Szymon Kalich from Edmonton, who was found dead in the hallway of a residential building and whose mother received the news when the police showed up on her doorstep two days later. It is a nine-month-old baby in Winnipeg, who was rushed to the hospital by paramedics after being exposed to residue of the opiate in his parents' home.

From coast to coast to coast, no community in any member's riding is immune to this epidemic. According to the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, 734 people died of opiate-related causes in Ontario in 2015, averaging two people every day. This number totals far more than the 481 people who died in motor vehicle accidents in 2014.

Over 80% of all opiate-related deaths in 2015 were accidental. Almost 60% of accidental deaths occurred among youth and younger adults between the ages of 15 to 44 years. Fentanyl use increased by 548% between 2006 and 2015, and fentanyl is now the opiate most commonly involved in opiate-related deaths.

British Columbia and Alberta have been hit the hardest. According to the Coroners Service of British Columbia, overdoses of illicit drugs claimed the lives of 922 people in B.C. in 2016, making it the deadliest overdose year on record and representing an

increase of 80% from the previous year. In B.C., from January through February of 2017 there were 139 illicit drug overdose deaths in which fentanyl was detected. This is a 90% increase over the number of deaths, 73, occurring during the same period in 2016. From January to February of 2017, fentanyl was detected in 61% of illicit drug overdose deaths, 139 of 227.

Vancouver Coastal Health had the highest number, 48, of illicit drug overdose deaths in which fentanyl was detected in January and February 2017, followed by Fraser Health with 39 and Vancouver Island Health Authority with 29. The health service delivery areas with the highest number of fentanyl-detected illicit drug overdose deaths in January and February of 2017 were Vancouver with 43, Fraser South with 24, and the Okanagan with 15.

● (1115)

When looking at individual townships over the same time period, the highest numbers of deaths were seen in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. In 2016, a review of toxicological findings of 325 fentanyl-detected illicit drug overdoses deaths was conducted. In 96% of these deaths, at least one substance other than fentanyl was detected. The other most frequently detected drugs leading to death were cocaine, methamphetamines, amphetamines, and heroin. Parliamentary data in January 2017 suggested that the proportion of illicit drug overdose deaths with fentanyl detected, alone or in combination with other drugs, is approximately 61%.

According to Alberta Health, 343 people died from fentanyl overdoses in 2016 in Alberta. The province showed a 33% increase in the rate of overdose deaths linked to the drug from 2015, and a dizzying 110% rise from just two years ago. Calgary saw the lion's share of the death toll, with 149 deaths in 2016. Of those 343 deaths, 22 were linked to carfentanil, an opioid that is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl.

Alberta's fatality numbers have not reached the level of B.C.'s, but the toll has been devastating, claiming 717 lives since 2014, 261 of those in Calgary. According to the report from Alberta Health, 80% of those who died last year were male, nearly half between the ages of 25 and 39. In most fentanyl overdoses, multiple substances were also involved, primarily cocaine, methamphetamine, and alcohol.

I would like to give more standardized statistics for each province and each year, but this epidemic has exploded so quickly that many provinces do not yet have a system for organizing information. It has been called a Canada-wide disaster.

Private Members' Business

In Ottawa, the director of the city's drug treatment program has stated that the fentanyl being sold in the streets is too strong to even be treated by overdose antidote kits. In late April, The Ottawa Hospital reported 15 fentanyl overdoses over a period of 72 hours. However, there are other new synthetic opioid painkillers similar to fentanyl on our streets. W-18 is similar to fentanyl, but 100 times as toxic. It is 10,000 times stronger than morphine. In 2015, it was detected in three drug seizures. By October 2016, it was detected in 30 drug seizures.

I truly understand the need for robust prevention and treatment options for addicts, but you cannot rehabilitate dead people. The criminals who import and export deadly drugs and substances do not care about the effects they are having on people's lives. They do not care if they will be responsible for the deaths of many Canadians. They are not deterred by the current punishment for the crimes they are committing. What they know is that they can take \$10 worth of fentanyl and make \$5,000 selling it on the streets.

As it stands, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act provides inadequate and unintimidating punishment for criminals who import and export lethal drugs and substances. Those who import and export these drugs and substances must be brought to justice and must face increased mandatory minimum sentences. Our constituents expect us to do more to keep their children and communities safe.

• (1120)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a resident of British Columbia, specifically on Vancouver Island, I need only look across the water to see how bad the fentanyl crisis is in Vancouver.

Indeed, and I direct my comments to the government side, if we had an infectious disease killing at the rate that overdoses are in British Columbia, the government would have mobilized far more resources and in a much quicker time frame than has been done.

I am glad to see that the Conservatives recently joined us to declare the opioid crisis a national health emergency, but when we attempted to move Bill C-37 through the House quickly to deal with the problem, Conservatives attempted to block it. I am just wondering what the member's reasoning was for that blocking.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Speaker, one death is far too many. The numbers in this epidemic have gone up over the past five years. Look at the numbers in B.C. of 992. We need to make sure that we put an end to this crisis. Most of the drugs are coming from overseas. We need to put an end to this, especially the drug dealers who are making a profit on the lives of Canadians.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this very important piece of legislation forward for discussion. A recent study of the Insite facility in Vancouver found that over 86% of the drugs that are used at that facility are laced with fentanyl, and over 90% of the heroin.

Right now the people of Edmonton, and the Albertans he mentioned, are being faced with the Edmonton city council, in its infinite wisdom, which is complete sarcasm, deciding to bring these sites into the downtown core of the city, knowing that these drugs are laced with other drugs. We see the usage rates between Alberta and B.C. being virtually the same. I am wondering if my colleague could

comment on whether he thinks it is wise for the city of Edmonton to pursue this policy when we see the absolute and total damage that making drugs more accessible and readily available is causing to communities.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Speaker, the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, and any city in any province, should be doing what the hon. member suggests. As I said earlier, a life saved is a life saved. From the Conservative side, we will always be on the side of the victims. We will always stand up for victims rather than for the criminals. On the Liberals' side, it is the other way around. They always stand for the criminals rather than the victims.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I read the member's private member's bill, there is a great focus on punishment. I am wondering if he has given any consideration to the issues of prevention, treatment, and harm reduction. Canada has proudly followed a four-pillar strategy in dealing with this health crisis, yet there seems to be very little in the bill that speaks to the other three pillars. I wonder if he would like to expand on that.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Speaker, there are many things that we can balance. It is all about the balancing act. We are saying, let us get the drug dealers. The Liberal Party has brought some things to this issue that would help, but this is about taking the drug dealers off the streets. For 40 years, the former police chief put those criminals behind bars. I hope we can keep up the same by asking for two years of imprisonment for less than one kilogram of the drugs, and three years for over one kilogram. It is not much to ask. In my view, some of these guys should be charged with murder rather than sending them to two years in jail. It is not much to ask.

• (1125)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this morning, Bill C-338, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which proposes to increase mandatory minimum penalties and imprisonment for the importation and exportation of certain drugs.

The objective of Bill C-338 is to target the importation and exportation of powerful opiates such as fentanyl in Canadian communities, an objective that everyone in the House would agree is laudable. The bill proposes to denounce the importation and exportation of these lethal drugs by increasing the mandatory minimum penalty from one to two years where the quantity of these drugs is less than one kilogram and certain aggravating factors are present. In other cases, the mandatory minimum penalty would be increased from two to three years. The bill also proposes to increase the mandatory minimum penalty from one to two years for the importation or exportation of any amount of a schedule II drug, namely cannabis.

Private Members' Business

As has been already articulated in the House this morning, we find ourselves in the midst of a national health crisis, and this has put the spotlight on the importance of comprehensive and evidence-based Canadian drug policies.

Canadian communities are feeling the devastating impact from the growing number of opioid-related deaths and overdoses. Canadians deserve nothing less than concerted government action that would have an immediate impact on addressing the influx of opioids in our communities. The policies put in place to respond to this crisis must be informed by performance measurement standards and evidence. These policies must have an immediate impact on reducing the number of these tragic deaths.

This is why I am happy to see that the Government of Canada has instituted a modernized Canadian drugs and substances strategy. The Canadian drugs and substances strategy is focused on prevention, treatment, and enforcement, but it also reinstates harm reduction as a core pillar of Canada's drug policy. The CDSS champions a comprehensive, collaborative, compassionate, and evidence-based approach to drug policy.

In furtherance of this strategy, the Minister of Health introduced Bill C-37, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related amendments to other acts, to address the serious and pressing public health issues related to opioids. This legislative response is one important part of the government's comprehensive approach to drug policy in Canada.

Bill C-37 proposes, first, to simplify and streamline the application process for supervised consumption sites; second, to clamp down on illegal pill presses; and, third, to extend the authority of border officers to inspect suspicious small packages coming into Canada. In relation to the last point, extending the Canada Border Services Agency's inspection powers is important, because one standard-size envelope can contain 30 grams of fentanyl, potent enough to cause 15,000 overdoses. These numbers increase exponentially where the substance in question is carfentanyl.

In addition, the government has invested over \$65 million over five years to support the new CDSS and implement its five-point opioid action plan. This amount is in addition to the \$10 million in emergency support that the federal government has provided to the Province of British Columbia to assist in its response to overwhelming numbers of overdose and opioid-related deaths in that province. The five-point opioid action plan is focused on increasing public awareness, supporting better prescribing practices, reducing access to opioids in appropriate cases, supporting better treatment options for patients, and improving Canada's data collection and evidence base to inform more effective drug policies in the future.

That is not all that the government of Canada is doing. Canada is also working closely in collaboration with our international partners, such as the United States and China, to address this crisis. Senior law enforcement and border officials are already working together on a regular basis to curb the flow of illegal opioids across international borders, and I will cite an example. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has reached an agreement with China's Ministry of Public Security to enhance operational collaboration, identify key areas of concern, and work towards a more coordinated approach to combat fentanyl trafficking originating from China. Such partnerships are a

testament to the reality that this epidemic is a very serious international problem which will require international co-operation to fix. Addressing the roots of the opioid crisis demands a whole-of-society response.

This brings us to Bill C-338. Although its stated objective is both timely and I am certain well intentioned, the proposed increase to mandatory minimum penalties is neither likely to contribute to deterring offenders from importing and exporting powerful opiates, nor to have any impact on addressing opioid-related deaths across Canada.

• (1130)

I am not aware of any evidence suggesting that increased mandatory minimum penalties would be effective in reducing the importation or exportation of these lethal drugs, including opiates, into Canada.

Although deterrence is a frequently cited argument of supporters of mandatory minimum penalties, my understanding is that the vast majority of the research in this area shows that these mandatory minimum penalties are ineffective in deterring crime. In fact, the likelihood of being caught represents the far greater deterrent.

In addition to the fact that increasing mandatory minimum penalties would not likely have a meaningful impact on lowering the number of opioid-related deaths in Canada, Bill C-338's proposal to increase mandatory minimum penalties would have a number of adverse effects on the proper administration of the criminal justice system, all of which have been well documented here in Canada and abroad. I am aware of several studies that suggest that mandatory minimum penalties actually lead to far fewer guilty pleas, increased litigation, and an increase in the time required to complete cases.

Given the Supreme Court of Canada's recent decision in *Regina v. Jordan*, we must be mindful of policies that contribute to excessive delays, which plague our criminal justice system. In fact, last month, when federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for justice met to discuss priority responses to further reduce delays in the criminal justice system, they unanimously identified mandatory minimum penalties as one area of legislative reform that could help in improving court delays. International research also reveals that the use of mandatory minimum penalties to combat the war on drugs in the United States has resulted in far higher costs associated with the dramatic increase in litigation and the use of imprisonment.

I am also concerned about the charter risks associated with increasing mandatory minimum penalties. I am aware of two recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions that clearly state that mandatory minimum penalties that apply to offences that can be committed in various ways under a broad array of circumstances and by a wide range of people are constitutionally vulnerable. Based on these rulings, I am concerned that the mandatory minimum penalties proposed in this bill are vulnerable, because they could apply to offenders who have committed a crime for which the proposed mandatory minimum penalty would be unjust.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-338's increased mandatory minimum penalties are not necessary to signal to Canadian judges that these offences should be treated seriously. Canadian judges, in appropriate cases, already exercise their discretion to impose significantly higher sentences in excess of the proposed mandatory minimum penalties. For example, in *Regina v. Cunningham*, the Court of Appeal for Ontario confirmed that the appropriate sentencing range for first-offender drug couriers who smuggle large quantities of cocaine should be in the range of six to eight years' imprisonment. In that decision, the court, mindful that many drug couriers are easy prey for commercial drug traffickers, noted that such concerns must give way to the need to protect society from the untold grief and misery occasioned by the illicit use of hard drugs. In fact, it increased a three-year sentence imposed to five years' imprisonment and stated clearly that it is the responsibility of the courts to warn would-be couriers, in no uncertain terms, that they will pay a heavy price for choosing to import large quantities of hard drugs for quick, personal gain.

More recently, the British Columbia Court of Appeal, in *Regina v. Smith*, noted that given the development of a public health crisis surrounding opioids, a higher sentencing range was appropriate for certain trafficking offences under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

I am confident that the courts will impose just sentences based on the facts before them. On the whole, I believe that the approach advanced by the government is the right one. Changes to increase mandatory minimum penalties may seem on their face attractive, but they simply will not work to address the public health emergency. For all the reasons I have noted, the government will not support Bill C-338.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to add my thoughts and voice on Bill C-338. I would like to thank the member for Markham—Unionville for this bill. I know that his intentions are good with respect to this bill and that he, like all members in this House, is concerned about the rash of overdose deaths that are spiking across the country, especially from fentanyl.

Unfortunately, the bill before us does nothing to address the phenomenon of drug use and sees fit only to increase the punishment, through mandatory minimums, for those who are engaged in the import and export of certain substances listed under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Bill C-338 would amend subsection 6(3) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to punish those who import schedule I or schedule II substances. Schedule I substances include opium, codeine, morphine, cocaine, fentanyl, and of course, the deadly carfentanil, while schedule II is known mainly for cannabis and its derivatives.

Specifically, under paragraph 6(3)(a), the bill would make an amendment so that there would be an increase from a minimum punishment of one year to two years' imprisonment for not more than a kilogram of a schedule I substance or for any amount of a schedule II substance. Under paragraph 6(3)(a.1), the bill would make an amendment so that the minimum punishment was increased from two years' to three years' imprisonment for importing and exporting a schedule I substance that is more than a kilogram.

Increasing mandatory punishments is a favourite legislative pastime of the Conservative party, and this was especially true under the previous Harper government.

The opioid crisis Canada is experiencing is a national emergency that had its origins in my home province of British Columbia. It is a complex phenomenon, a problem the Conservative legacy of supposed tough-on-crime legislation has been ineffective in stemming.

The Supreme Court of Canada has been particularly critical of some of the mandatory minimums, from the previous government, it has struck down. In April 2015, the Supreme Court dealt the Harper government's tough-on-crime agenda a serious blow by striking down a law requiring mandatory minimum sentences for crimes involving prohibited guns. The six-three ruling, penned by the chief justice, took aim at the government's keeping-Canadians-safe justification for tough sentencing laws. In her ruling, she said,

The government has not established that mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment act as a deterrent against gun-related crimes.... Empirical evidence suggests that mandatory minimum sentences do not, in fact, deter crimes....

In April 2016, the court ruled six-three that a mandatory minimum sentence of one year in prison for a drug offence violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court ruled that the sentence cast too wide a net over a wide range of potential conduct and stated in its ruling:

If Parliament hopes to maintain mandatory minimum sentences for offences that cast a wide net, it should consider narrowing their reach so that they only catch offenders that merit that mandatory minimum sentences. In the alternative, Parliament could provide for judicial discretion to allow for a lesser sentence where the mandatory minimum would be grossly disproportionate and would constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

Bill C-338 stems from a belief that we can arrest and incarcerate our way out of the problem of drugs in our society. However, if we look at the facts, they show otherwise. Police-reported drug offences in 2014, after the Conservative tough-on-crime legislation from the year before, showed that meth possession went up 38%, heroin possession went up 34%, MDMA possession increased by 28%, meth trafficking went up by 17%, and heroin trafficking went up by 12%. It is clear that the Conservative agenda on mandatory minimums for drug crimes has not decreased drug use across the country, and it is evident that we need effective solutions now.

The Conservatives recently copied the NDP's call to declare the opioid overdose crisis a national health emergency, yet the Conservatives blocked our attempt to move Bill C-37 swiftly through the House in December, which would have saved lives faster.

Private Members' Business

If we look at some of the main points in Bill C-37, it would simplify the process of applying for an exemption that would allow for supervised consumption, which has been shown to help people take care of their issues. It would prohibit the importation of designated devices, which are used in manufacturing drugs. It would have expanded “the offence of possession, production, sale, or importation of anything knowing that it would be used to produce or traffic in methamphetamine”. These were clear-cut solutions to a problem our province has been long suffering through and that is now making its way across Canada.

• (1135)

I would like to read some quotes from validators of our position.

Dr. Virani, who is a medical director at Metro City Medical Clinic, in Edmonton, said:

I have yet to meet a police officer who has said they can arrest their way out of this problem, and I have yet to meet a judge who's said that he can incarcerate his way out of the problem, and I certainly hope that health isn't thinking [they can] ignore-and-wait their way out of this problem, because it is clear it is getting worse and worse.

British Columbia's provincial health officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, said:

Simply prohibiting and increasing penalties without resources to support and educate haven't been terribly effective. [But] you need to do a number of things to limit the supply of drugs on the street.

I am disappointed and frustrated that the Liberals' promise of a review of mandatory minimums is not complete. It was last year that the Supreme Court handed down its decision on the Jordan case, which was in response to decades of inadequate resources for our justice system from successive federal and provincial governments. We now have a situation where serious criminal charges are either being stayed or withdrawn.

While I appreciate that the Minister of Justice has recently met with her provincial counterparts, I sincerely hope that the review of mandatory minimums is completed soon and in a comprehensive way so that we do not have a continued piecemeal approach to justice legislation created by private members' bills, like the one before us today.

Canada is currently experiencing an unprecedented opioid overdose crisis. Illicit drug overdoses claimed the lives of 914 people in B.C. alone in 2016, making it the deadliest overdose year on record and representing an increase of nearly 80% from the year before.

A significant spike in drug-related overdoses in 2016 prompted B.C.'s provincial health officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, to declare a public health emergency for the first time in the province's history.

Under the Harper government's anti-drug strategy, \$190 million was budgeted for treatment alone in the first five years of the strategy, from 2007 to 2012, but only \$77.9 million was actually spent. The total treatment budget for the next five years of the strategy was cut to \$150 million. However, this represents \$40 million more than the Liberal budget has allocated for its entire Canadian drugs and substances strategy. How much longer do we have to wait for the current government?

I will now move on to my conclusion. We need real measures that deal with the problem of drugs, rather than tying judges' hands in

sentencing laws in order to appear tough. A sentencing judge should retain the discretion to sentence within the limits set by Parliament. Judges must be able to weigh all the evidence and decide on a fair sentence that fits the crime. Mandatory minimums take away judges' ability to do just that.

I sincerely fail to see how increasing jail time by a year for those who import or export schedule I or schedule II substances is in any way going to contribute to a meaningful reduction in drug use in our country. It is for that reason I will be voting against Bill C-338.

We need the federal government to take leadership on the opioid crisis now. Mayors and premiers have been asking for help dealing with drug overdoses. It is time that we all work together to bring forth effective policies to tackle this national crisis.

• (1140)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased stand to congratulate my colleague from Markham—Unionville on this very important private member's bill, Bill C-338.

As we know, the opioid crisis is impacting communities and families across Canada. My home of British Columbia has been on the coalface, where the addictive use of drugs is now playing Russian roulette. Users never know when they have something in a drug that will kill them.

It does take a multi-pronged approach to tackle this issue. It is a public health emergency, and we continue to ask the Liberal government to recognize it as such. However, it is also important to realize it is a criminal justice issue. This has not been spoken to very well in all the conversations I have heard about this issue.

I will talk a little about how the bill would provide a very important tool, but it is important to first talk about the scope of not just the problem, but the tragedy. We need to also talk about what has been done to date and, more important, what still needs to be done to deal with this issue.

As many are aware, the recent epidemic is characterized by an increasing number of deaths with illicit fentanyl, an opioid substance. Fentanyl was detected back in 2012, when it was in 5% of illicit drugs. By 2016, it was as high as 60%. Fentanyl, carfentanyl, and other drugs are cheap. They are easy to synthesize, and readily available, with a significant volume coming into the country from China. It is being cut into street drugs, with lethal effects.

Private Members' Business

Carfentanyl, which is a tranquillizer used for elephants, was confirmed on the streets last fall. It is 100 times more potent than fentanyl, 4,000 times more potent than heroin, and 10,000 times more potent than morphine. If anyone has ever had an accident or injury where he or she has received a dose of morphine in the hospital, carfentanyl is 10,000 times more potent. It is coming in by mail order from China. A Calgary man was arrested in September with one kilogram, which could have killed 50 million people.

In B.C. alone, four people have died every day in 2017. It is not any better from 2016. We are on track to go from 900 and some to 1,300 deaths. In one week alone in Vancouver recently, there were 15 deaths. Again, we are averaging four deaths per day. This is just British Columbia, but it is happening across the country.

The people who are dying have many profiles. They might have struggled with addiction for many years or it might just be a young teenager at a party who, for the first time, makes a very bad decision. A recent Facebook post traumatically affected many. A brave mother from Calgary, Sherri Kent, posted a picture of her in a hospital bed with her son Michael just before he died. He was in the intensive care unit, connected to many tubes. There was absolute anguish on her face as she was saying goodbye to him. He had made such a terrible mistake. She did that to raise awareness throughout Canada.

There has been some action to date. Certainly, British Columbia is taking a good lead. Our colleague from Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam introduced the good Samaritan Act, which was recently proclaimed. That was a good step. There is better availability of naloxone, which is used to treat an overdose, although we now hear these drugs have become so potent that people do not respond to it the way they used to.

Bill C-37, which the government put into place, had some good measures in it. However, I continue to have concerns that it moved away from community consultation on safe injection sites. That is an important gap and it is still missing, especially as we now know many of the people who are dying would never use a safe injection site. Although this measure has value in some communities, to take away the ability for community input or to require community input was a bad step.

• (1145)

The banning of the pill presses or importation of designated devices was a good step, as well as some additions to the schedules of substances when there was a reasonable grounds to represent risk.

Most important was the additional power for Canada Border Services to inspect and search packages. We heard that with 30 grams, service agents did not have to inspect. That is absolutely critical because this is coming into the country in an envelope. That is a good measure.

What has been missing in our struggle against this crisis? The federal government. Although the provincial government in British Columbia has asked, the federal government continues to decline in declaring this a state of emergency. The Public Health Agency of Canada should be playing a role in this. There is no good education and awareness campaign. We need the federal government to take on a comprehensive education and awareness campaign.

The next area that has had inadequate services and support is detox and recovery. That is primarily provincial. I know many examples of people who are desperate to get off drugs and turn their lives around. They have found that they do not have any opportunities in the support they need to detox.

We have not talked about the criminals, and my colleague is doing that. These people are knowingly importing and selling drugs on the street, which do kill people. This bill would specifically target gangs and other criminal organizations by introducing tougher sentences for drug traffickers who would exploit the addictions of others for personal profit. Those who import and export these drugs should be brought to justice and should encounter increased mandatory minimums.

I listened to my Liberal colleague. All of a sudden the Liberals have this huge obsession that mandatory minimums are not good. However, mandatory minimums have been around almost as long as the Criminal Code. Probably half of the mandatory minimums were put in place by Liberal governments. For the Liberals to argue that mandatory minimums are always bad and that there are all these issues with mandatory minimums is absolutely ridiculous. They have put many of them in place.

The argument is that mandatory minimums are bad and they do not help. Getting criminals off the street, even if it is for two years, is two years when they are not out there putting fentanyl in drugs that are killing children.

The other thing the Liberals need to be held accountable for is that this is a mandatory minimum of somewhere between two years and life. This is not fettering the discretion of judges. It is saying that parliamentarians believe judges cannot go below two years, that there are no circumstances, ever, where less than two years is an appropriate sentence for someone who is potentially killing our children.

It should be attempted murder. It could go as high as the maximum, jail for life, but, as parliamentarians, we are saying that for those who put fentanyl into drugs and sell them on the streets or bring them in with that purpose should go to jail for two years, at the absolute minimum. For the Liberals and the NDP to say that is not okay is absolutely appalling to me. They need to say that to the mothers and fathers, the families that have lost their children, that they do not think it will help and that they do not want to have a baseline of two years for these people to go to jail.

Private Members' Business

This is a reasonable bill. Canadians and Parliament have been saying forever that there is baseline for what is acceptable. For people importing drugs, lacing drugs, and selling those drugs on the streets, doing it knowing people can be killed, two years in jail as a mandatory minimum is simply not even enough. The fact that the Liberals and the NDP will not support the bill is absolutely shameful.

• (1150)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand to speak to this bill. The bill really touches the tip of the iceberg with respect to these drugs.

I heard my colleague talk about how other parties were opposed to mandatory minimum sentences. From past experience, I know we have had mandatory minimums on a lot of crimes. Impaired driving is the most frequently charged Criminal Code offence, and has had mandatory minimums for a long time. This offence is equal to impaired driving.

This bill would address those people who bring drugs into the country for no purpose other than to provide them to younger people, typically, who perhaps do not realize what they are ingesting. Many times the drugs are a real danger to the first responders who attend: the police, the firefighters, and the ambulance and hospital staff.

Increasing the offences for people importing and exporting these controlled drugs and substances should just be the beginning. Everybody in here should be supportive of that. We face a rising tide of crime in relation to the public health crisis we are facing with opioids. Codeine, fentanyl, OxyContin, hydrocodone, and morphine have become household names as Canadians learn of the extent of this crisis and families suffer losses of their loved ones.

I truly wish that those people who are opposed to having mandatory minimum sentences for individuals who break this law, bring the drugs into the country and distribute them across the country could see how families are torn apart by these drugs.

Diverted pharmaceuticals, fentanyl purchased from China, and stolen horse tranquillizers are finding their way onto Canadian streets with fatal consequences. Most worrying of all is the speed with which illegal opioid sales have grown and the number of overdoses. To put things into perspective, the chief coroner for British Columbia told us at the health committee that the percentage of illicit drug deaths involving fentanyl increased from 5% in 2012 to 60% in 2016. If that is not enough to wake up everybody in the House to the fact that we need to do something to get mandatory minimums in place, I do not know what will wake them up.

It is not just a crisis that affects those who find themselves living without a home, but one that affects Canadians of all ages. Fifty-five thousand Canadian high school students indicated that they had abused opioid pain relievers in the past year. That is a tremendous number.

In Ontario, one in eight deaths of individuals aged 25 to 34 years was found to be opioid-related in 2010. That number will not go down; it will simply go up. Families are being destroyed, communities are being invaded, and all Canadians are experiencing reduced access to health and social services because of the resources required to fight this epidemic. This is a public emergency that hits close to home.

Organized crime has now found a foothold in places and at levels never seen before. When the other side wants to legalize marijuana and when we see what this has done, we can only project what the future will be for organized crime. Even for those people who live in areas free of dealers and opioid users, the effects of this drug in drug crime are still felt in people's access to services.

First responders have had to divert significant resources to address this crisis. Ambulance services, firefighters, police, and hospital emergency rooms are all having resources diverted to address this crisis. This means other crimes committed against local residents are not being investigated. It means ambulance resources are increasingly overworked as they respond to a spike in drug overdoses. It means firefighters now have to additionally consider the chance that what appears to be a simple residential fire may in fact be an illicit and contaminated drug lab, a danger to both their immediate safety and their long-term health.

This says nothing about the increased burden on social services that are already stretched due to the Liberal government's lack of support to local communities.

• (1155)

Mental health workers are already facing an uphill battle against criminal gangs continually pushing all kinds of harmful drugs into the community. If we are to help those most in need, then we also need to fight this crisis at its source and punish those who would wish to continue it. This would bring justice not only to those caught in addiction, but to the sons, daughters, husbands, wives, brothers, and sisters already lost to these lethal street drugs.

I recognize that the opioid crisis is multi-faceted, but Bill C-338 is one key step in cutting off the source. I support the bill because criminal enterprises are not facing harsh enough sentences for diverting legitimate pharmaceuticals to illicit street drugs. Those pushing opioids into our streets and communities need to know that their actions will incur serious penalties.

The House is currently debating Bill C-307, which, through tamper-proof safeguards, would deny illegal manufacturers the easy ability to use legal prescriptions to create illicit substances. Cracking down on this prescription loophole would deter many Canadians from selling their prescriptions for easy profits. If we can increase the possibility of serious jail time for dealing illegal opioids, we can send a message to all criminal enterprises that Canada is a place they should not risk operating in.

Business of Supply

I would be the first to admit that this one change would not solve the entire problem. A whole host of changes are required to stop opioids from ending up on our streets. Canada's physicians need to overhaul prescribing practices for opioids. Too many prescriptions are being exploited for criminal profit and manufacturing. We must ensure the quick implementation of measures to allow Canada Border Services Agency employees to check packages smaller than 30 grams, and we must ensure they are properly enforced, as called for by Conservative members. Enforcing this measure would ensure an end to the previously unlimited supply of fentanyl mailed in small packages from China.

The government must also ensure that once we have removed these opioids from the streets and placed the criminals behind bars, these same drugs do not end up infecting our prison populations as well. Canadian prisons are currently facing great problems in keeping these dangerous narcotics out. Correctional Service Canada has reported that now even fentanyl has found its way behind bars, as well as the overdoses connected with it. The government needs to ensure that Correctional Service officers have the proper equipment to deal with this rise in overdoses and do more to keep these drugs out of our prisons.

In conclusion, I would say that we need to tackle the source of this problem, which is the lack of treatment options for those with mental health issues, who, as a result, are left most susceptible to dealers and other criminals. If the ongoing mental health crisis is allowed to continue in our streets, on our reserves, and in our schools and universities, the drug crisis and the criminal enterprises that go with it will only continue to grow.

A national strategy for dealing with this is an absolute priority. Whether it is fentanyl, crystal meth, or the next street drug that is easy to produce and cheap to buy at the heart of this drug epidemic, it is the people who are emotionally hurting. This is why the human face of this epidemic is so heartbreaking to acknowledge. These are vulnerable people who have chosen drugs because they do not have the support and the necessary tools to take on life.

Those who would wish to exploit them for illicit gain must know that they will face the full force of the law and serious jail time. This is why I am asking all members of this House to understand the further pain that opioids are causing to Canadian families and to support this very important piece of legislation, Bill C-338.

• (1200)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opioid crisis in Canada is something that the government has recognized. The Minister of Health has done a phenomenal job working with the many stakeholders, particularly the Province of British Columbia, not only recognizing the problem but taking actions that will ultimately assist in resolving the problem the best way we can.

The member and others are aware of Bill C-37, a bill introduced by the Minister of Health, which addresses the opioid crisis. However, that is not all this government has done. The government has also provided an additional \$65 million over five years for national measures to respond to the opioid crisis and implemented an opioid action plan. In addition, the government has provided \$10

million in urgent support for British Columbia, to assist with its response to the overwhelming effects of the emergency in that province. We recognize that this issue goes well beyond the province of British Columbia. The government is seized with the issue and will continue to move forward.

With respect to the issues the member has brought forward in this legislation, the parliamentary secretary said it best, that measures are already in place in Canada. Quite often, the courts will exceed the three years.

• (1205)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary will have eight minutes remaining in his time when the House next resumes debate on the question.

[Translation]

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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC) moved:

That the House has lost confidence in the Minister of National Defence's ability to carry out his responsibilities on behalf of the government since, on multiple occasions, the Minister misrepresented his military service and provided misleading information to the House.

He said: Mr. Speaker, usually I rise and say that it is an honour to get up and speak, but today is unfortunate in that we have to debate this motion to discuss the comments made by the Minister of National Defence and some of his other misleading comments. There is also a question of privilege that I have already raised in the House on another matter.

Today, opposition members will make the case that the Minister of National Defence has had only a casual relationship with the truth, that he has continually misled the House and Canadians, and that his behaviour is demoralizing our troops and has caused our veterans to be incredibly angry. We also know that our allies are going to have trouble taking him seriously. There is a credibility issue here. We know that the minister's reputation is now damaged beyond repair, and it is a sad state that we have had to come to this point, where a motion is required in the House to ask the minister to resign.

I expect that the Minister of National Defence will get up today and offer an apology. I expect that he will factually state what his service record is. None of us disputes his actual service record. He has served honourably in three tours in Afghanistan and one tour in Bosnia. He was a lieutenant-colonel in the reserve force, and he has always been commended for his service and for the efforts he has put in on behalf of Canada.

Business of Supply

The minister will go on to talk about other issues. He is going to try to change the channel so that we are not talking about his comments and his embellishment of history. He is going to start talking about the defence policy review and all the great things the government is going to do, but it is really unfortunate that we cannot talk about those things, because nobody trusts the defence minister at this time.

We will be the voice for those veterans and military members who were first disappointed and then outraged, and are now in dismay and despair over the minister's conduct. It is actually demoralizing our front-line soldiers. Not only are we going to talk about the role of the minister in Operation Medusa, but we will also come to the question of privilege that I have in the House over his misleading comments and the facts revolving around our troops who are in the fight against ISIS at Camp Arifjan and having those danger pay benefits taken away and not returned in their entirety.

We will also talk about the so-called capability gap in our fighter jets and how that does not match up to what members as well as past commanders of the Royal Canadian Air Force have said. We will also touch on the minister's comments in the past that pulling our CF-18s out of the fight against ISIS was something that he never received any commentary on, even though the facts, through an access to information request, prove otherwise.

We know that under the leadership of the Minister of National Defence we have seen budget cuts in two successive budgets by the Liberals, which have reduced the spending and future investments in our military by \$12 billion. Now with the minister's credibility completely undermined, by himself, I might add, there is no way that our military trusts him to actually deliver anything in the future for them.

Finally, it comes back to whether or not he has the strength at the cabinet table to get things done, to stand up for our troops, and to deliver the equipment and the budgets that they need to go forward.

One of the best comments that capsulize why our Minister of National Defence would embellish his service record in Operation Medusa comes from retired Lieutenant-General William Carr, who is the father of today's modern air force in Canada, someone we could actually call an architect. He said in a letter to the editor:

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan's search for recognition is a national embarrassment.

To the sailors, soldiers and airmen in the Department of National Defence, his image is, at best, one of an insecure veteran in a field he professes to know. For the good of the Canadian Forces, his departure would be a relief.

● (1210)

That sums up the calls, emails, letters, and social media posts that have inundated my office.

It is critical that we look at the code of conduct the minister is subjected to, both formerly as a serving member of the Canadian Armed Forces and now as the Minister of National Defence. The definition of "integrity" from the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Code of Values and Ethics states:

To have integrity is to have unconditional and steadfast commitment to a principled approach to meeting your obligations while being responsible and accountable for your actions. Accordingly, being a person of integrity calls for honesty, the avoidance of deception and adherence to high ethical standards. Integrity insists that your actions be consistent with established codes of conduct and

institutional values. It specifically requires transparency in actions, speaking and acting with honesty and candour, the pursuit of truth regardless of personal consequences, and a dedication to fairness and justice. Integrity must especially be manifested in leaders and commanders because of the powerful effect of their personal example on peers and subordinates.

That is there for all to see online. There are tables that actually lay this all out. Table 2 clearly states that it is applicable to all DND employees and all members of the Canadian Armed Forces. People are expected to act above the law, to be transparent and ethical, and to have integrity.

If someone did what the minister did, under the code that both the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have, that person would show a lack of integrity. Those in service can be court-martialled. Those are the guidelines that are applicable in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces.

As the Minister of National Defence, as the leader of the entire armed forces as well as all employees, the minister has to be held to the highest standard and has to meet that high bar each and every day. Anything below it is a failure.

The Prime Minister's "Open and Accountable Government" document, which lays out the code of conduct and ethical behaviour of ministers and parliamentary secretaries, says:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must act with honesty and must uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity and impartiality of government are maintained and enhanced.

This reflects on the Prime Minister. He has laid out in this code of conduct that he expects open and accountable government, and yet the Minister of National Defence has failed to live up to that code.

Everyone is wondering, and I hope that today the minister will explain why he felt he needed to embellish his story on Operation Medusa. This was not just a misspeaking. Video evidence shows that he first said this in 2015, when he was campaigning as the Liberal candidate to become the member of Parliament for Vancouver South. He said it quite openly. We do not know how many times it has been repeated behind closed doors or in meetings where he claimed to be "the architect" of Operation Medusa.

On April 18, in a speech in Delhi, the minister clearly stated it. Again, it was not just him speaking. He actually inserted it himself into his speaking notes. People can get the speech online. It has been checked against delivery, meaning that it has gone through the proper processes of being reviewed by the department and by the minister's own staff. The *National Post* reported on April 30, "It was [the minister] who personally inserted 'the line about Medusa' into the speech, his spokeswoman Jordan Owens said Sunday." This was not a misspeaking. This was not an accident. This was intentional, and that is very disturbing.

● (1215)

It has been called all sorts of things in the media. We know that people are outraged. We understand that, because everyone expects the minister to be held to the highest ethical standards. Everybody expects that he will act with honesty and avoid deception. His story, his embellishment, his over-exaggeration of his role in Operation Medusa as the architect has also been described as stolen valour.

Business of Supply

I received correspondence from retired Major Catherine Campbell, who served 27 years in the Canadian Armed Forces. She also served 18 years as an employee at DND. She sent a letter to the Minister of National Defence. She wrote: "I have to say that I have great respect for what you did in Afghanistan. I don't know why that wasn't honour enough for you. Apparently, it wasn't because on at least two occasions you misinformed us. You claim to have been the architect of Operation Medusa when, as a major working in intelligence, you had nothing to do with the battle plan. That honour belongs to other soldiers, your superior officers. Now, everyone knows that. Worst of all, everyone in the Canadian Armed Forces knows it and they have lost all respect for you. You know enough of the military to know that you cannot continue to lead the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, having lost the respect and trust in this way.

Her letter continued: "I listened to your answers in question period and it was painful. Your response, perhaps drafted by the PMO, was that you made a mistake. A mistake? No, you did not make a mistake. You deliberately and intentionally misled everyone on at least two occasions. You don't get to say, 'I made a mistake and now I'm sorry.' No, I'm afraid there's only one thing for you to do under these circumstances, and that is to resign and make a heartfelt apology to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces for having misled them and having been untruthful about the worst thing that a service member or an officer can be untruthful about in the Canadian Armed Forces.

She wrote: "I imagine you've read the manual *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*. I recommend that the minister read it again and perhaps then he will understand what he has to do."

That comes from one of our veterans. Long-serving members who have been there alongside the minister, serving this great country and doing what needs to be done are so disappointed.

Today's soldiers, today's troops, are also being impacted by the actions of the Minister of National Defence. One parent contacted me and asked that I not use his name because he wants to protect his family member who is currently serving. He said: "This morning, I spoke to my son about the matter stolen valour by the Minister of Defence. I have to tell you first-hand that, without any doubt, this is a matter that has directly affected the morale and confidence of Canada's front-line infantry soldiers. There is no greater betrayal to the trust and confidence of soldiers than stolen valour. The minister, by fabricating his role to his country for his own personal gain and profile, has undermined and betrayed the trust of the men and women he is supposed to represent. I wanted you to know this. As the father of a young soldier that would give his life to this country, that this deception has shaken the Canadian Forces, from the minister's office right down to the infantry soldier. If the minister has any remnant of a military officer left in his conscience, he will do the right and honourable thing and remove himself from office."

That capsulizes what people are feeling about the minister's comments on Operation Medusa.

We also have to go to the question of privilege that I raised in this House over the minister's misleading comments on tax relief and danger pay benefits provided to our soldiers at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, and how it also applies to others. If members will recall, I

have been raising this in the House for some time. It started with bringing it to the minister's attention privately. Then we brought it up at committee. Then we asked questions here in the House. He continued to say that he was going to take care of it and did not.

• (1220)

There actually had to be a motion brought in from the Conservative side, which received unanimous support, to reinstate the danger pay benefits to all our troops who are fighting ISIS. The answer to my Question No. 600 on the Order Paper, under the minister's own signature, clearly states that it was the Liberals in September 2016 who took away the danger pay of already deployed troops, who went there under the understanding that they were going to receive upwards of \$9,000 in benefits, which have been removed. The minister continued to say it was the Conservatives who took away these benefits.

The Conservatives were not in government in September 2016. The Liberals were. The minister's answer, dated January 30, proved that the benefits were there, effective October 5, 2014, when the Conservatives were still in power, to September 1, 2016, when the Liberals took them away. The minister actually put out a press release saying that they restored them, but they did not. They only restored half of them.

We received letters from various soldiers who are serving over there. They sent a letter and there was a blast out to everyone here in the House. It said that our troops in Kuwait right now are feeling despair at this point because they do not feel valued or recognized for the risks they are facing and the hardship placed on their families here at home while they are deployed.

There is another issue I would like to raise. This information was received through an access to information request. It has to do with when the Minister of National Defence ordered our CF-18s to return home from the fight against ISIS, that we stop bombing ISIS terrorists, and that we bring them home.

The minister was over in Iraq meeting with the Iraqi defence minister and other government officials on December 20. On December 21, he met with the Kurdistan regional government. He said in an interview in *The Globe and Mail* on December 21, 2015, "I haven't had one discussion about the CF-18s", not one, and yet, our access to information request clearly stated, in a wire that was sent home on December 22, in writing a summary for December 20 about Canada's Minister of National Defence, "the Iraqi minister of defence was clearly focused on Canada's decision to withdraw its CF-18 fighter jets from the coalition air strikes, asking the [Minister of National Defence] to reconsider this decision on numerous occasions". On December 21, he said it was never once brought to his attention.

Business of Supply

We know he was going to Erbil to meet with the Kurdistan regional government, but we know on October 21, 2015 that the chief of staff to the Kurdistan regional government said, “It was bad news for us.” Then on November 22, the foreign affairs minister of the Kurdistan regional government said, “We’d like to keep the air strikes.” This is all public information on the discussions that they had with our Minister of National Defence. He keeps saying that our allies were ecstatic about our pulling out our CF-18s. Again, it is misrepresenting the facts, misleading Canadians, and undermining his own credibility.

Finally, I want to come back to this issue of a capability gap of our fighter jets. We know that it is a fabricated issue that the minister invented to try to make commentary on why we need to sole-source Super Hornets. Lieutenant-General Michael Hood, the commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, said in committee that there is “sufficient capacity to support a transition to a replacement fighter capability based on the ongoing projects and planned life extension to 2025 for the CF-18.” He also stated on November 28, “We were comfortable as an armed forces in meeting those”—NORAD and NATO commitments—“with our extant fleet. That policy has changed with a requirement to be able to meet both of those concurrently, as opposed to managing them together,”—which we’ve always done as a nation—“thus the requirement to increase the number of fighters available.”

Finally, we had 13 former commanders of the Royal Canadian Air Force who have written that purchasing the Super Hornets is ill-advised, costly, and unnecessary because there is no capability gap.

• (1225)

As members can see, the Minister of National Defence has a long track record of misleading this House and misleading Canadians, to the point that now Canadians do not believe him. We know that our troops no longer trust him and are demoralized. Our veterans are outraged that he is no longer taken seriously by our allies.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed in the member across the way and the Conservative Party’s approach to dealing with this. Let me share a couple of things and maybe the member will respond.

There was an invitation from the Ukrainian community in Manitoba for the minister to come out, and I happened to be in the audience. I heard a very proud Minister of National Defence talk about how wonderful a job our men and women are doing abroad, with a special focus on Ukraine. I believe that if one were to canvass that room, one would have found there was unanimous agreement that what is happening abroad is in fact very admirable. It was the Minister of National Defence who talked about the glory of how our men and women abroad are serving our country and doing such a fantastic job.

The member across the way likes to use terms such as “a misrepresentation” or “misleading information”. He needs to look in the mirror. When it came to the hardship pay or danger pay element, the Harper government said that it brought it in for our men and women abroad. I will ask the member across the way to be honest and confirm that it was this Minister of National Defence who

ensured retroactive payments, that it was this minister who made it happen for our men and women—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Winnipeg North wants to stand here and say that the Liberals did everything they could have done to help out our troops in Kuwait, I can say that the troops do not buy it. They do not believe it. They only got half of what they deserved, three out of six months, with no extension going forward for those who will be continuing on over there for the next two years in Operation Impact.

We know that when the Conservatives faced a similar situation, ministers like Peter MacKay and Jason Kenney acceded and said that they were not going to do that, that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are in service in the fight against ISIS would get their danger pay. They always received it. We brought forward a motion that the Liberals endorsed. They had to because it would have been too embarrassing otherwise. They only provided three out of the six months. That is another reason why our troops are so demoralized, because they do not trust the current minister to fight and advocate for them to ensure that they get the benefits they deserve.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I am on my feet in this debate, I want to start by saying on behalf of the New Democratic Party that no one in our party questions the bravery of the service of the minister in Afghanistan. This is not a question of what he did in Afghanistan. It is a question of what he has done as minister, and I hope this debate stays focused on that today.

The issue of transparency, following his apology, means we need to know exactly what it was he did do in Afghanistan. In a particular sense, he made the decision on behalf of his government not to hold an inquiry into the transfer of detainees. The Conservatives focused on a lot of issues around the minister’s role, but said nothing about the issue of whether there should be an inquiry into the transfer of detainees. The work the minister was doing was on the Conservative watch in Afghanistan. Do the Conservatives agree with us in the New Democratic Party that there needs to be a full public inquiry into the possible transfer of detainees to face torture in Afghanistan?

• (1230)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, Parliament has already looked at this issue. However, I will say that we do support the idea from our friends in the NDP that we need to look at the role the Minister of National Defence had in the collecting of intelligence, because he was not just collecting intelligence for the Canadian Armed Forces; he was also sharing that with allies, and how that intelligence was used in the potential mistreatment of Taliban prisoners in Afghanistan. First and foremost, there is that question.

Business of Supply

Second, we know that the minister has provided different versions of his role in Afghanistan as it applies to Operation Medusa. There is the role that he actually played, which we all congratulate him for and thank him for his service. We are not questioning the facts. There is the idea that he is the architect. Then there is the question of the version that he gave to the Ethics Commissioner when he was looking at this from the standpoint of a conflict of interest as the minister, in his role. He actually diminished his role by saying that he was just a reservist there providing cultural outreach, training military police, and collecting some intelligence. It goes from his being the architect to his just doing some cultural outreach and collecting intelligence. There is a whole breadth of differences there that we need to really look at.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the member opposite brought up Mr. MacKay, because quite frankly, when it comes to national defence, the Conservatives are known for their fishing trips, and this motion is absolutely no exception.

The reality is that this minister has served his country valiantly and he made a mistake. We are talking about a grammar mistake, the difference between the words “and” and “the”. It is unfortunate that the member opposite is politicizing a grammar mistake, because we have a lot more interesting and important issues that we could be debating today, including the fact that right now we have 1,600 brave men and women working on Operation Lentus through the Trois-Rivières-Gatineau corridor.

Does the member opposite really feel that a grammar mistake warrants this conversation?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I just want to join the member in thanking all the brave men and women who are currently working against flooding in Quebec and along the Ottawa River. It is very dangerous right now, and we appreciate their valiant work in standing up for Canadians who are dealing with property damage and whose lives are at risk.

This was not a grammar mistake, as we already pointed out. The term was used on numerous occasions. It was written into a speech by the minister himself. We clearly outlined that there is a habitual pattern of misleading Canadians by the Minister of National Defence. That is the reason we are having this unfortunate debate today. A minister of the crown, and in particular the Minister of National Defence, is to be held to the highest ethical standards. What we have today, unfortunately, is just not good enough.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for bringing this issue forward. It should have been discussed last week, but some punitive action by the Liberals across the way removed our opposition day motion last Thursday, delaying it until today. I am sure that was not a procedural tactic at all to try to put some time and space between the minister and his unfortunate comments.

My question is for my colleague who is moving the motion today. The Prime Minister stood in this House and said that he has absolutely full confidence in the minister. If the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, veterans, and most Canadians no longer have confidence in the minister, that would imply they no longer

have confidence in the Prime Minister and his judgment in this matter as well.

In the 11 years that I have been a member of Parliament in this House, I do not recall a motion like this ever coming forward. I would like my hon. colleague who moved this motion to talk about the tie between the irresponsible choices that the Prime Minister is making and the choices that the minister has made as well.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is right that we actually tabled this motion last week. We were supposed to have our opposition day on Thursday, and the Liberals changed our day to today. Instead of dealing with it when we should have, we are dealing with it today.

Second, this is a reflection on the Prime Minister, on his choices for cabinet, and on whether or not he is going to stand up for what is ethical, what is just, and what is right. We are not seeing him do that at this point in time.

When we look at history, when everyone is saying this was just one incident, we see that there are a range of incidents in which the Minister of National Defence has misled Canadians. When we in government, we had a minister who resigned over a glass of orange juice, because it called into question her ethics and her lack of judgment in making a choice on a glass of orange juice.

We are not making a mountain out of a molehill here. This is about the character of and the fundamental basis of who people are and how they serve the government. That is what is at issue here. This is not about the service record of the minister, which I am sure he is going to talk about now in detail, including all the great stuff he has done as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces; this is about the minister's behaviour over the last year and a half, and how our military no longer trusts him and how Canadians no longer believe him.

● (1235)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to pass on my condolences to the families who have had losses in recent flooding in Quebec and in British Columbia. I thank all the Canadian Armed Forces members who are serving today in Operation Lentus.

There are a lot of critical issues facing the Canadian Armed Forces, and I am grateful for the opportunity to raise some of these in the House. My job as minister of national defence is to serve the women and men in uniform who so proudly serve our country. I am privileged to have this responsibility and I will continue to work as hard as I possibly can, every single day.

There are many of us in the House who have at one time felt the call of duty to serve in uniform, and we are proud of their service. The members for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Kelowna—Lake Country, Durham, Winnipeg North, and Kanata—Carleton all served our country in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The members for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount and Winnipeg Centre both served in the Royal Canadian Navy, and the latter spent a significant time in the Canadian army as well.

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The members for Terrebonne, Beauport—Limoilou, Orléans, Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Abitibi—Témiscamingue, Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, and Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge all served our great country in the Canadian army.

Many were cadets, including the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore, highlighting how the cadet program is one of the finest youth leadership programs in the country.

The member for Brampton Centre also served in uniform, with the Indian Air Force.

I thank them all for their service. They are a credit to the uniform, and their experience is invaluable to this place.

We must always remember that when someone decides to serve their country in uniform, the whole family serves alongside them. I know there are several members with relatives who have served or are currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. For example, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs has two sons serving as junior officers. We honour those who stand behind our troops and support them at home.

I am proud of the actions our government has taken since coming to office. Our women and men in uniform serve all Canadians, not just the government of the day. That is why our government has taken important steps to make the Canadian Armed Forces more open and accessible to all members of Parliament on behalf of the constituents they serve. We re-opened Canadian Armed Forces bases, detachments, airfields, and ships to all parliamentarians, senators, and officials from different levels of government in an effort to highlight the work our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen do on our behalf every single day. We want all parliamentarians to participate in our program so they can take their experiences and stories to their ridings and inspire a new generation to heed the call for service.

We are also taking politics out of the selection process for honorary colonels. We are appointing Canadians with deep community roots to represent our regiments, wings, and ships from coast to coast to coast.

Canada is taking a more significant leadership role in NATO than it has in decades. As one of four framework nations, we are leading a battle group stationed in Latvia as part of the alliance's enhanced forward presence initiative. This will provide meaningful deterrence against any repeat of Russia's provocative behaviour.

We have of course also renewed Operation Unifier, demonstrating solidarity with Ukraine in our training mission there. We refocused our contribution to the fight against Daesh, and Canadians are now making an even greater impact as part of the global coalition, and we are seeing results. Canadian Forces are part of a broader whole-of-government approach to the conflict in Iraq and Syria and are also making a difference in that region. I was fortunate to be able to work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development on the renewed Operation Impact.

Our government has taken decisions and taken action to replace our aging fleet of fighters, something the previous government had 10 years to do, but did not. It is because of that decade of decline and

inaction that we no longer have a fighter fleet that can meet our NORAD and NATO commitments simultaneously.

● (1240)

It is certainly true that the Royal Canadian Air Force has done an admirable job in risk managing this capability gap and, yes, it has the planes it needs to continue to risk manage effectively. The previous government felt this was an acceptable situation, but we are a G7 nation, and our government has made it clear that it is not good enough to risk manage our commitments; we are going to meet them.

That is why we have taken action to address this capability gap by exploring the purchase of an interim fleet of fighters, and of course we will conduct an open and transparent competition to replace the entire fleet. I want to thank the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, the President of the Treasury Board, and our colleagues on the defence procurement committee for all their work on the fighter jets.

We have finally awarded a contract to replace our fixed-wing search and rescue planes, another important project that went in circles over the past decade. Our search and rescue technicians work day and night in dangerous conditions keeping Canadians safe. They deserve the best equipment and support possible, and I am proud of finishing this process that started under the Martin government.

I am proud of the work our chief of the defence staff and the Canadian Forces are doing to stamp out inappropriate sexual behaviour under Operation Honour. Every person who serves her or his country despite the many dangers and sacrifices of military service deserves a professional environment in which he or she is treated with respect and dignity. There is a great deal more to do, and it is essential that the Canadian Armed Forces maintain the momentum developed to date in eliminating harmful and inappropriate behaviour. Our government fully supports this work.

I have been the Minister of National Defence for about 18 months now, and it has been just as rewarding as it has been challenging. While the actions we have taken so far are indeed important, there is a lot more work to do. In the 2015 election campaign, we promised to conduct a comprehensive review of defence policy and engage Canadians and parliamentarians in the process, and we have done just that and more.

I know the official opposition does not like to deal in facts when it comes to defence, but there is a fact it cannot ignore: Canada's defence spending, as a proportion of GDP, was considerably lower when the Conservatives were removed from office than when they came in. However, it is not just about the spending numbers. It is about our outputs; it is about the Canadian Armed Forces' contribution to Canada's role in the world; most of all, it is about fully supporting our women and men in uniform and their families. That is why the defence policy review has been so important.

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It has been 20 years since a real policy review was done, and it was long overdue. I believe it is important for Canadians and members of this House to understand exactly where we are starting from before we talk about where we need to be and how we plan to get there.

It is true that successive governments contributed to the current state of affairs in the Canadian Forces. I know parliamentarians of all stripes, despite the rhetoric and finger-pointing that occur here, understand that underinvestment has caused real problems, yet the state of affairs is in some ways worse than realized by most observers.

I know members understand that we cannot build the Canadian Armed Forces this nation needs through a series of short-term decisions. I know members understand that a military is not strengthened by cobbling together pieces from one budget to the next, by succumbing continually to the pressures of the urgent at the expense of the strategic, and by hoping that 20 years down the line, all of the disjointed ups and downs will somehow result in the military we need. That is why, when launching a defence policy review, we set out to take the long-term view to deliver a credible, realistic, and funded strategy for our military.

Let me state outright and up front that the Canadian Armed Forces delivers what governments ask of it every single time. It has performed superbly, regardless of the resource constraints it faces. All Canadians can be proud of the fact that our women and men in uniform answer the call of duty whenever and wherever it is found. In recent years alone, it has deployed to Iraq to contribute to the global efforts in the fight against Daesh; it deployed to Nepal just 48 hours after a tragic earthquake struck that tiny nation; and it deployed with NATO to bolster alliance resolve and deterrence against Russian actions in Ukraine.

• (1245)

At home, they helped the residents of Winnipeg and Fort McMurray overcome massive floods and devastating forest fires, and today they are deploying in several regions of Quebec to assist provincial and local authorities with the devastating floods in that province. The Canadian Armed Forces is an inspiring institution that makes me proud every single day. Responsive, professional, and dedicated, it is counted among the best militaries in the world. However, militaries cannot perform well forever without proper support.

Governments have a responsibility to uphold their end of the bargain, to care for their military, resource them properly, and fund them in a responsible way that meets their needs. In the past, governments have not delivered predictable, sustainable, long-term funding for the Canadian Armed Forces. It has not been a straight line.

Let me take a moment to retrace some of the twists and turns. In 2004-05, the Paul Martin government implemented annual budget increases of around \$1.5 billion in successive years. After that, the budget grew incrementally, predominantly to cover the cost of the combat mission in Afghanistan, until it ended in 2011. Two deficit-reduction programs followed: the strategic review, and the deficit reduction action plan. By the time that these were fully implemented in 2015, each reduced the annual defence budget by \$1

billion, for a total of \$2 billion per year. The defence escalator, which was implemented to protect the DND budget from defence inflation, was increased from 1.5% to 2% in 2011, and beginning this fiscal year, it increased from 2% to 3%. However, even that will not be sufficient to meet our future requirements.

Years of ups and downs have contributed to unpredictability for those responsible for supporting, maintaining, and sustaining the forces, and the planning for its future. The reductions have left the organization hollow in a number of areas. Fighter jets and ships are prime examples of the unfortunate link between inadequate investment and capability gaps. Canadians were told a few years ago that the government would buy 65 new jets to replace our aging fleet of CF-18s, but for the missions that we asked the Royal Canadian Air Force to undertake and our alliance commitments, 65 jets would simply not be enough; it would only be a fleet for risk managing our requirements, not meeting them. Furthermore, the \$9 billion in funding that was earmarked for jet replacement by the previous government is nowhere near enough to cover the 65 jets proposed.

For the navy's new surface combatant, the previous government ended up saying that it would buy up to 15 ships. As has been well reported, the budget identified was dramatically insufficient and unrealistic. The Royal Canadian Navy deserves a clear, realistic, and fully funded commitment. Canada's naval capabilities are at a 40-year low right now. The number of operational ships in Canada's fleet has dropped by five in the past two years alone. Ships have been retired without replacement, because any plans for investment simply came too late. Without a single destroyer in its fleet, Canada will rely on the U.S. and NATO for area air defence until the introduction of our new surface combatants. Without a single supply ship, Canada is relying on the capabilities of allies and partners for its replenishment needs as well.

These examples alone would be troubling enough, but there is much more to grapple with. Closing recruitment offices made it harder to attract new recruits, and cutting the number of procurement officers made it difficult to buy, maintain, and sustain all the tools and equipment we could afford for our military. We are in the troubling position where status quo spending on defence will not even maintain the status quo of the capability.

Current funding has us digging ourselves into a hole, a hole that is getting deeper every single year. As a percentage of our GDP, we are spending less on defence today than we were in 2005. There is a list of major capital projects that are entirely unfunded. These are not nice-to-have projects; these are projects that must be completed to allow our military to keep doing what it is doing, investments that need to be made in the forces' key equipment and capabilities, and no funding has been allocated for them.

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●(1250)

Our air force will need funding for mid-life upgrades to its Cormorant search and rescue helicopters. We are talking about a critical need to invest in a fleet of aircraft that our air force uses in operations every day to help Canadians in distress.

They also need sufficient funds to extend the life of the Griffons. These are highly reliable helicopters that have served our air force faithfully on missions at home and abroad. These helicopters are used to transport troops and materials. They have done so on humanitarian missions, on operations in Afghanistan, and now in Iraq. The Griffons can fit right into a C-17 Globemaster, so they are easily transportable and give the forces flexibility and agility in responding to crises around the world. However, if we do not fund their life extension project, we need to phase them out, because helicopters with obsolete instrumentation cannot fly in North American air space. No money was allocated to keep them running.

With the army, we discovered that no funding has been allocated to allow soldiers to keep doing some of their most important work. Without support from our allies, Canadian soldiers deployed overseas would be exposed to threats emanating from aircraft, missiles, and long-range artillery. Investments in ground-based air and munitions defence systems are required to guarantee the safety of our deployed troops, yet no money has been earmarked to provide this protection to our soldiers in the past.

There are several other examples of projects that the army needs the government to fund in order to ensure it can continue to assist Canadians during natural disasters to meet international commitments. Its fleet of heavy support equipment, such as forklifts, loaders, and excavators, needs to be replaced so that our soldiers can build camps as well as roads and shelters. The list of activities that our soldiers undertake with this equipment is long, and yet, here too, no investments were planned.

Furthermore, the army's fleet of logistic support vehicles, such as trailers and medium-sized trucks used to transport supplies and essential equipment, has been significantly degraded over time and must be replaced. These capabilities are essential to sustain our soldiers at home and abroad. Again, no investment was planned.

The resourcing problems that we have found the most troubling are the ones that have directly affected our servicemen and women. In over 25 years as a reservist, I saw first-hand the way that our governments have failed to properly equip a reserve force. Not only is there not enough equipment, but the training to use what equipment they have is lacking as well. Our reserve units are tremendously resourceful and they perform extremely well, despite having been underfunded for so long. However, that does not excuse the failure to properly resource our reservists. They deserve gratitude from the governments that deployed them away from their families and in harm's way.

Instead, when they take off the uniform, they get pension cheques delivered way too late. They have to run an obstacle course when they retire from the military, and they get shortchanged in more ways than any government would want to admit.

These are some of the problems to be solved. Before it can build anything new, Canada's new defence policy must first get us out of the hole that we are starting in.

That is why we have sought input from parliamentarians from all parties, and why we sought input during a series of expert round tables, including the industry round table. That is why we consulted Canadians across the country, through our online portal and town hall discussions. We also had round table discussions to hear from the indigenous communities, members of academia, and other expertise, on gender-related issues. We want a thorough understanding of how every facet of our defence policy would impact our own people and Canada generally.

We will act on the evidence gathered throughout the defence policy review. The process has made clear that there is the need to focus on emerging domains like space and cyber, and the need to remain a trusted and capable ally.

Canada's new defence policy will be just that. It will be a plan to get out of the hole that we are starting in. It will be a plan to build an even stronger military. It will be a plan to allocate realistic funding to those bread-and-butter projects that will keep our military running effectively and efficiently for years to come. Most of all, it will be a plan to care for the women and men who put on the uniform and serve Canada.

●(1255)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said earlier that it is unfortunate we have had to have this debate, and now it is disappointing that the minister did not even acknowledge his embellishment on Operation Medusa today. This is his opportunity to explain himself to all the veterans and everyone in the Canadian Armed Forces who are watching today, to get a better handle on why the minister misrepresented the facts.

Last week, we had a major fundraiser for veterans from Afghanistan called Party under the Stars, To the Stan and Back. The minister skipped it because he said he had to prepare his speaking notes. To me, that is pretty thin ice to skate on, if he was actually going to make up an excuse for why he could not be there to support those suffering from operational stress injuries.

I plead with the minister right now. Will he get up, do a sincere apology, and explain himself to our veterans, to current serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and to Canadians who are having trouble understanding why he would say what he said about Operation Medusa, and then ultimately try to do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, I made my statement. I also made my statements in the House and answered the questions. I am focused on making sure that we support our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces.

When I took office, I wrote two letters to all members of Parliament to take the politics out of defence. That was so we could all work together toward making sure that we get advice and experience from everyone to be able to move forward and analyze where we are at. For a second time, I am giving a state of affairs of where we are at so that we can come up with solutions.

I am focused on making sure that our men and women have all the necessary tools so that they can fulfill their missions at home and abroad.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am disappointed that the minister did not take this opportunity to provide the transparency we really need on what his role was in Afghanistan, so I would like to ask him two very specific questions.

In interviews for the book called *Fighting for Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War*, and also confirmed by Brigadier-General Fraser, the minister said that he was an intelligence officer and a key liaison person to the governor of Kandahar, the Afghan national police, and the national director for security. If that was his role in Afghanistan, could he confirm that he participated in the decision by the Liberal government not to hold an inquiry into the transfer of detainees, or did he make that decision? Did he participate in it or make that decision, because he would be in a direct conflict of interest, as he would be a key witness at any such inquiry?

Could the minister tell us whether he participated in that decision or did he make that decision himself?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the work that our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces and our civilians did in Afghanistan throughout the mission.

I have answered all of the commissioner's questions. I would be happy to make myself available to the commissioner and also to any officer of Parliament. I have also explained what the terms of my responsibilities were.

Like I said, I would be happy to talk to the commissioner any time regarding this matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I need an explanation because I am having a hard time understanding why the minister said that.

I served as an officer for 22 years. I knew many officers who participated in various operations throughout Afghanistan, Bosnia, and other parts of the world. We talked a lot at the officers' mess in the evenings. We told stories and sometimes talked about operations, but no one ever said that they had launched or planned a mission in someone else's place, if such was not the case. People were very humble. One of my best friends jumped on a mine on three separate occasions in Afghanistan, and you would have to work very hard to worm it out of him. He considered that to be part of his job and so he felt no need to talk about it.

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces are very humble, and when the army awards medals to people for their acts of bravery, it does so based on the recommendation of the superior officers who

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witnessed those acts. That is how it worked in the Second World War, and that is how it works in other battles.

However, how many hundreds of thousands or tens of thousands of people never received a medal because no one witnessed their act of bravery? They simply did their job.

I just want to know why the minister took the credit for something he did not do. That is the big question: why?

• (1300)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his service in the Canadian Armed Forces. I take every opportunity to highlight the work of our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. I have always done that, and I will continue to do so.

As the Minister of National Defence, I am also focused on making sure that our troops have all the necessary tools they need, not only for current missions but also for the ones we might send them on in the future. This is not just about looking at the now; we need to make sure that our troops are set up for the future. That is my responsibility as part of the government.

We, as a government, are going to be moving forward on making sure that our Canadian Armed Forces are set up for the next 20 years. That is exactly what our defence policy is going to do.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister, particularly for laying out in as candid a way as possible the state of the Canadian military, which has suffered greatly over the last number of years. I would be interested in his commentary as to the decline over the last 10 years with respect to the previous government.

When the Conservatives became government, the military's budget was \$18.7 billion or 1.19% of GDP. When they left office in 2015, the military's budget was \$19.2 billion, a slight increase of half a billion dollars over the entire 10 years encompassed there, with a GDP of just a hair's breadth over 1%. When the member described the state of the Canadian military and applied an inflation factor to the actual decline in the budget, we get a situation as described in his speech.

It would be interesting to hear the minister's comments on how he intends to rectify this state of affairs that he sadly inherited from the previous government.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, as I have stated many times before, as well as when we launched the defence policy review, the Canadian Armed Forces needs predictable and sustainable funding so it can plan.

However, first, we needed to understand exactly from where we were starting. The defence policy review allowed us to look at the facts of the current state. As I stated, the deficit reduction action plan cut \$1 billion. The reason for the review is to understand where we are at, then to determine where need to go, and to ensure we focus on outputs of where we need to be to focus on Canada, on what our place is in the world. Then we need to figure out the capabilities and to have a rigorous costing process to ensure we have the numbers, so we can have a fully costed defence policy. That is exactly what we are going to have.

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Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on my previous question for the minister. It is on his lack of clarity about his role in making the decision not to hold an inquiry into the transfer of detainees to face torture that caused conflict of interest complaints to be laid against the minister. I want to ask a very specific question of the minister.

When he was interviewed by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, did he tell her that his role in Afghanistan included being an intelligence officer and liaison with local authorities, like the governor of Kandahar, the Afghan National Police, and the director of national security, all of whom have been accused by Canadian officials of being involved in the torture of detainees?

• (1305)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, I answered all the questions of the commissioner.

Many other people have characterized my role. I told her my role. She was satisfied with the answer. I will always make myself available to the commissioner and any officer of Parliament to answer their questions.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister commented on a number of members on that side of the House who were elected because of their military experience. Many members on this side of the House were elected because of their experiences in uniform.

Most of us probably moved ahead of the pack we were running against because of the trust and loyalty the communities gave to us and the service we provided for them.

I want to ask a very simple question. The minister mentioned that he was the architect of the Medusa operation, and then apologized and said that it was a mistake. Now we have people standing on the other side of the House saying that it was a grammar mistake.

Does the minister still think he has the respect and trust of those communities?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, first, when I mentioned all the members who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces, I included members from the other parties as well. If I missed any, I apologize for that because they, too, have provided a valuable service and I want to acknowledge that.

When we talk about using our experiences, both our party and the opposition party talked about the planned increases. I am happy, and it is very fortunate, that our Prime Minister asked me to conduct a thorough defence policy review to ensure we had accurate information. That is exactly what we have done.

At the end of the day, what Canadians expect of me and our government is to ensure we provide all the necessary tools to the men and women who serve us, to ensure they have all the right capabilities, and that is exactly what we focused on.

I would invite all parliamentarians to visit the Canadian Armed Forces, which have been made more accessible. Before, it required ministerial authorization to even visit a base. We changed that immediately to ensure all parliamentarians had access, so they could have good, relevant information to provide proper input, as they did for the defence policy review.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate, I will just remind hon. members that in selecting the members who participate in the period during questions and comments, the Chair usually gives preference to those members who are not members of the party of the member or minister who just spoke, but not to the exclusion. That usually means, in a 10-minute round of questions and comments, a member of the same party as the member who just spoke might get one moment or one opportunity to weigh in on questions and comments. However, by and large, the balance will be for the members of the other parties. The same thing goes, as the speeches rotate across the parties across the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin the heart of my remarks, I would like to join other members of Parliament in thanking the Canadian Armed Forces for the work it has done in combatting the floods in Quebec and the Ottawa River valley today. Also, the minister did miss in his listing of those who served in the Canadian Armed Forces, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, a proud New Democrat member of Parliament and one of the few female veterans in the House.

It is with no pleasure that I rise today to speak to the motion and I will take no pleasure in having to vote for the motion. However, we are faced with a situation where the Minister of National Defence has lost the confidence of a broad sector of the Canadian public, certainly a broad sector of the Canadian Armed Forces and possibly also our allies. Therefore, we believe he can no longer continue to lead the Canadian Armed Forces as the Minister of National Defence.

It causes me a great deal of personal angst to have say this. The minister has treated me, as his opposition critic, with respect. As I have said before, he is someone who all members in the House honour the bravery and distinction with which he served his country in Afghanistan. However, that is not the topic today. Nor is it the topic that the minister addressed in his speech, which was a broad review of defence concerns.

The topic is what the minister has said about his service in Afghanistan, and the wound the minister has suffered is self-inflicted. We have three versions before us of what the minister's role was.

Early on, in a letter to the Vancouver Police Department, when he returned from one of his tours of duty in Afghanistan, his commander, Brigadier General Fraser, said that he was a key intelligence officer. In interviews the minister he gave to Sean Maloney, Royal Military College Professor, in the preparation of his book *Fighting for Afghanistan*, he emphasized his intelligence role and his liaison role with the governor of Kandahar, the national director of security, and the Afghan National Police. That probably constitutes the heart of his role and a real contribution to Canada's effort in Afghanistan.

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Unfortunately, as minister, he or his government then made a decision, and we now have conflicting stories about who actually made that decision. However, at a minimum, he participated in a cabinet decision that there would be no inquiry into the transfer of detainees in Afghanistan to face torture and the Canadian role in those transfers. This is problematic. The minister would have key information for any such inquiry. He should neither have participated in the discussions about a decision not to hold an inquiry nor, even worse, if he personally made that decision. He certainly is the person who announced the decision on behalf of the government. Under the British concepts of ministerial responsibility, which we follow in the House, he is the minister responsible for that decision.

As a result of that, conflict of interest complaints were filed with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, one of those by Craig Scott, former member of the House and a distinguished professor of law at the University of Toronto. It appears from the letter, a copy of which I received from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, that the minister then told a second story about what his role was in Afghanistan. In this second version of his story, he said that he was merely a reservist working on capacity building with police in Afghanistan and in that capacity would have had no knowledge of the matters of transfer of detainees. If this is indeed what he told the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, it is a direct contradiction of his previous interviews he gave and his previous commanding officer.

That is why following the minister's speech I asked him very directly to let us know what he told the Conflict of Interest Commissioner about his role in Afghanistan. That is why the member for Outremont, the leader of the NDP, has written to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and asked her to review her decision to close that conflict of interest file, and she has agreed to review that request. That is our second version.

Through whatever strange reason, the minister repeated a claim, which he previously made as a candidate in 2015, on his recent trip to India where he exaggerated, at best, his role in Operation Medusa. The Conservatives have chosen to focus almost all their discussion on this question, which is referred to as stolen valour, and that is an important question. The minister has apologized and taken back that version of what his role was in Afghanistan.

• (1310)

The problem is that if an apology is to be meaningful, it has to be followed by full transparency. Therefore, we need to hear from the minister, and I was disappointed not to hear this from the minister today, why the three versions of his story exist and how he reconciles those three versions of his story.

I was also disappointed not to hear the minister address directly the issue of the conflict of interest. He is following the same mode the Prime Minister followed in his conflict of interest issues when he says that he is pleased to answer all the questions of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Where members are accountable in a parliamentary system is in the House. Therefore, the minister needs to not only answer truthfully to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, but the minister needs to answer truthfully and fully in the House. Unfortunately his speech this morning did nothing of the kind.

With respect to full disclosure, in my previous role before coming to Parliament, I worked for a major international human rights organization in Afghanistan. I was a researcher working in Kandahar before the minister arrived there as a reservist. Therefore, I do have some knowledge of what was going on at the time. It was very clear that the governor of Kandahar, and there were three different governors of Kandahar in very quick succession, faced very serious accusations of being involved in the torture of detainees in irregular detention centres, one of those being labelled a dungeon underneath the guest house at the Kandahar governor's palace.

These accusations were documented in Canadian documents in 2010 at the very highest level. Certainly, the former ambassador, Chris Alexander, made those allegations public. In addition, the allegations were made to the third of those governors. The one whom the minister most likely worked most closely with, Asadullah Khalid, was the governor of Kandahar from 2005 to 2008. The former Canadian ambassador made the accusations that Governor Khalid ordered a bombing that resulted in the killing of five U.N. human rights and aid workers to cover up his role in the narcotics trade in Kandahar.

I raise this question not to say that the minister was involved in torture, obviously not. Nor was he involved in the narcotics trade. No one should misunderstand me. I am not trying to cast aspersions on the minister's role in that sense. What I am trying to say is that if the minister was the liaison to these people, then he had key information about the torture of detainees and about other very illegal and despicable actions by the people to whom he was liaison.

It is very easy to consult many reports of international observers from that time who documented the use of torture in Kandahar province. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and many organizations had a look at this and were very clear that there were well-documented incidents of the torture of detainees.

Therefore, the question, which the Conservatives actually prorogued Parliament to avoid, since they were in charge of government at that time and when the minister was serving there, is what was Canada's role? Did we continue to transfer detainees into situations where we knew they faced possible torture? This would be a violation of international law and a stain on Canada's international reputation. A second part of the question, which is very important to me, is whether we used information obtained from torture for various military purposes. Again, this is a very serious question, both in the information derived from torture being highly unreliable and therefore it if was being used perhaps putting Canadian troops at risk, but also it is a very questionable practice under international law.

We know that a Conservative minister of public safety, Vic Toews, issued a ministerial directive allowing Canadian security forces to make use of information derived from torture. In his intelligence liaison role, the minister should have known that all those people whom he was liaising with faced these credible allegations of torture of detainees, and therefore when meeting the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, he should very clearly have said to her that his role placed him in a situation where he might have key information for such an inquiry.

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●(1315)

We have a Conflict of Interest Commissioner who has traditionally interpreted her mandate extremely narrowly and has focused on financial matters almost exclusively. I believe that there is a real conflict of interest involved that is not financial.

There is also the possibility that if the minister was called to appear before such an inquiry, it might affect his ability to continue as the minister, giving him a direct personal interest in not holding such an inquiry. However, we will not know the answer to that, because the minister refuses to answer questions about who made that decision. Was it a cabinet decision? Was it his decision? We just do not have an answer. Again, I asked him earlier this morning and failed to get a response from him.

Once he had spoken to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, he also gave interviews to journalists and is quoted as saying to Murray Brewster that he was not an intelligence officer.

We have all these questions. Knowing the minister personally, I have a hard time understanding how he got himself into this situation, because I find him very straightforward on a personal level. I find him very responsible and very open, so it is a mystery to me how he got himself into this situation and why he does not try to explain that. A simple apology, not accompanied by transparency and accountability, will simply be seen as meaningless words. We have to have those other parts to go along with the apology. I hope that the minister will still have a chance today to clear the air on these questions.

How does this affect his ability to carry on? I think we had a good example this morning in this debate when he presented quite an interesting discussion on the background of the Canadian defence review, but I do not think anyone was listening. No one was listening to the minister, because they still had those other questions in mind. They were still wondering if they could trust what the minister was saying on this because of the various versions of his role in Afghanistan.

It undermines his own credibility as minister to carry forward with this kind of work. Even if he is doing the best work, those questions, those clouds, will always remain behind him until they are answered and disposed of.

I met several members of the Liberal Party over the weekend, both back in British Columbia and in travelling back to Ottawa, who said to me that it was all just politics. I say, with respect, that it is not just politics. There is nothing more important than the ability of Canadians to trust in their ministers. This is something the Prime Minister wrote in the mandate letters he gave to all his ministers, that they had to achieve the highest standards of honesty and transparency. The minister still has the opportunity to do that, and I would hope he would take that position. However, what we have heard so far does not meet those standards laid out in his mandate letter for honesty and transparency. It is not just a matter of politics.

Members have also asked me what would make me happy. Of course, I do not like that question, because the question is not what would make me happy but what would benefit Canada here. How do we get a solution out of this controversy over the minister that benefits Canada? There are two ways the could proceed that I think

would make Canadians happy and restore minister confidence. One of those two would be to order an inquiry into the transfer of detainees in Afghanistan and to allow such an inquiry to go forward. It is something the Liberals supported when they were in opposition. However, now that he is the minister, we have them refusing to hold such an inquiry.

That may be too big a step for the minister. Because I have already said it was a conflict of interest for the minister to make that decision, I need to be a little consistent. Therefore, I will offer him a second option that does not involve that conflict, which is that he should request that the Prime Minister assign a different minister to examine this question. He should recuse himself from participating in the discussion as to whether there should be an inquiry into Canada's role in the transfer of Afghan detainees to face torture. He should ask the Prime Minister to ask another minister to make a new decision about whether such an inquiry is warranted. I believe it is an important part of Canada's international reputation to hold such an inquiry and to clear the air on our role in Afghanistan and the transfer of those detainees.

●(1320)

Unfortunately, I do not believe we will get either of those. The Minister of National Defence is going to attempt to muddle on as the minister. As I said before, when he brings out the defence review, it is going to be hard for people to focus on whatever good things are in the review and whatever good things he is bringing forward when there are still questions about how the minister described his own role.

There are two problems I see when the defence review eventually comes forward. One is that there was no money set aside in the budget, which we would have expected for new initiatives in a defence review. The last budget had no money set aside. I guess we are expected to believe that when the review comes out, the government will simply increase the deficit to take on new military activities. I do not believe that is true. I believe we will see a lot of good statements about policy, which will then be put off into the future, since there is no money in the budget to actually carry them out.

The second problem I see with the defence review is the exclusion of this House from participation in the defence review. The House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence played only a very small role, one chosen by committee members, to try to give the minister some input on the review. We were certainly not asked to do that. When the defence review was going on in Vancouver, I asked to go to one of the sessions and was told that members of Parliament were not allowed to attend, because it might interfere with the session. I find that a very strange concept.

We still have no commitment from the minister that when this defence review he has referred to so much today comes forward it will either be presented to this House for a vote or be presented to the defence committee. Again, without those commitments, it is hard for me to do much more than reflect on this controversy on the minister's understanding of his role when it comes to the new defence review. What is his role? Is it just his defence review, or is it one that will garner the support of Canadians across the board?

Business of Supply

As I said, I take no pleasure today in having this debate take place. I have only been here six years, but again, I have watched the House of Commons since I was first a candidate in the 2003-04 election, and I have never seen a motion like this before the House. We are, indeed, in a very sad situation, where we have to have a debate about whether Canadians can have trust and confidence in one of their cabinet ministers. On a personal basis, as I have spoken to the minister, this is someone I like and respect, so I take no personal pleasure in being forced to raise these questions in the House of Commons.

However, it is our duty, as members of Parliament, to make sure the government is held accountable and to the highest standards, and that is really the question before us today: Has the minister, in his role as Minister of National Defence, adhered to the highest standards of honesty and transparency that are required of any minister of the crown in Canada? If he has not, then this will inevitably affect his ability to lead the government and Canada as Minister of National Defence.

In conclusion, I say again that New Democrats will be supporting this motion, but we take no pleasure in having to do so.

• (1325)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member started by saying that this is a huge matter that has seized Canadians. I actually anticipated, when I went home this past weekend, that I would have a deluge of emails and telephone calls calling for the minister's resignation. Maybe after today's debate, it will change. However, when I went home, the only telephone call I received, which members will find amusing, was from a former Conservative candidate who lives in my riding and ran against me two or three elections ago. She was upset. That is the only telephone call I received. I have to say that this appears to be a big issue among members opposite, but it is not a big issue for the public.

I want to focus on the core part of the member's speech, and that had to do with the Afghan detainees. The member will know that at least five inquiries have been completed. He will know that there is a sixth inquiry ongoing, and he will know that the NDP had been asked to review any and all documentation with respect to those inquiries. Why did the NDP decline the opportunity to review the documentation with respect to Afghan detainees?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that my experience in my riding, and maybe it is because I represent a very strong military riding, was quite different from his. There was a great deal of interest in this controversy. I spent some time on a radio hotline dealing with calls on this issue and doing interviews. My experience was quite different from his.

On the question of inquiries into Afghan detainees, the member knows quite well that there has been no public inquiry. All the opportunities to participate in various reviews and inquiries had a very significant restriction: those who participated were not allowed, as a condition of participating, to make the information they found public.

Why did New Democrats not participate in those inquiries? It was because had we participated, we would have been gagged by participating, so we did not participate in those partial reviews.

What we need is a full public inquiry into Canada's role in the transfer of detainees to face torture. What we know is that the Minister of National Defence has key information on that topic for any such inquiry.

• (1330)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister a question earlier, and of course, he skated around it in his usual manner.

I thank the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for his service. I know there is a great military presence in the member's area. I lived there for many years.

As the member stated, he spoke on a talk show. The question I asked the minister, quite bluntly, was whether he still thought he had the respect and trust of the people or the military. Could the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke answer that question for me?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the proof that this confidence does not exist is the very fact that we have been engaged in this debate in the House of Commons now for some 10 days. This has not gone away as a topic of interest in the media or as a topic of interest in the public.

It is a real question. It is not a political question. It is a real question of whether the minister's credibility has dropped so far that we can no longer have confidence in him as a minister. As I said, to my knowledge, this is a virtually unprecedented motion in the House of Commons. It indicates the seriousness with which both opposition parties take this question, for slightly different reasons, with slightly different emphasis, I must say, but it illustrates the problem we have with the current minister. Anything he tries to do going forward as minister will be under the cloud of this controversy.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke has made some important statements on this issue. I do not think we can undermine the depth of unhappiness so many people are feeling across this country.

We ask the men and women in uniform to do so many important tasks for us. We have an international reputation we want to maintain of being a country that always does the right thing on human rights and that always stands up for the right issues.

With this minister in the situation we are in today, there is a gradual disheartening across the world and in our communities. As the member who represents CFB Comox, I know that my constituents have brought forth many concerns, and I share their deep concerns about this issue.

In terms of the very important comments the member made on full transparency, accountability to this House, full disclosure, and our reputation internationally, what does the member think we need to do next, and how does the minister make this right?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question gives me the opportunity to say that just as no one is questioning the minister's service in Afghanistan, no one is questioning the important role Canada played in Afghanistan and the important role our troops on the ground played, very bravely and with distinction.

Business of Supply

This is about decisions made at the highest level in the Canadian government to do with transferring detainees in situations where they might face torture. As I said to the minister in a question, there are two things he could do. First, of course, he could encourage the Prime Minister to order an inquiry into the Afghan detainee issue. I think that is unlikely to happen.

Second, the minister could recuse himself and ask the Prime Minister to have another minister, who was not so directly involved in this issue, look at the question of whether there should be a full public inquiry into Canada's role in transferring detainees to face torture. It is an important question of international law, and it is an important question of Canada's international honour.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question in regard to a comment made across the floor to a previous question, that this is not a big issue to the public, that it is not something on the minds of Canadians. I have received many letters and talked to many individuals within our Canadian Armed Forces who are distraught but are not able to maybe speak out on the way that they would like to. I want to quote a letter from a father:

This morning, I spoke to my son about the matter of Stolen Valour by the Minister of Defence.

I have to tell you first hand, without any doubt, this is a matter that has directly affected the morale and confidence of Canada's front line infantry soldiers. [...]

I wanted you to know this, as the father of a young soldier that would give his life to his country, that this deception has shaken the Canadian Forces from the Minister's Office, right down to the infantry soldier.

Would the member have any comments, specifically to the deception that has taken place in regard to the role that the minister played in Afghanistan?

• (1335)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member for Yorkton—Melville raises a very important point. When members on the other side say there is no public interest in this, they are actually denying our role in this Parliament, which is to be a representative of our ridings. It is passing strange to me that they would suggest we are making up these concerns on this side of the House, that we are not hearing from Canadians.

Are the members likely to hear it on the government side? I do not know. I cannot answer that question. I know that members on the opposition side have almost universally heard from the public and often from members of the Canadian military about their concerns. It is not an easy thing for members of the Canadian military to express those opinions, not so much out of fear of retaliation, although sometimes there is, but out of a fear of doing further damage to the honour of the Canadian military. It is a very difficult situation that they have been placed in, and their concerns are very real. I cannot answer for the government side, but on the opposition side, we are representing our constituents when we bring those concerns to the House of Commons.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, if it is a difficult situation for the hon. member to bring forth concerns from the public, imagine what it is like for the minister to respond to people who will not put their name to complaints. Unless there are real complaints, they are therefore anonymous complaints. However, one person did put his name to the service of the minister while in Afghanistan. It was

British army officer Chris Vernon, who said, “without Maj...input as a critical player, major player, a pivotal player I'd say, Medusa wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have had the intelligence and the tribal picture to put the thing together.”

Why are we debating the difference between “the” and “an” when the minister has apologized for his mistake? The one person who puts his name to what the then major did, says it was a pivotal role, a critical role, a major player. We are bringing an entire motion over whether the minister misspoke, for which he has apologized repeatedly.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, in essence the quote that the member has just given proves my point. If the minister had a key role in intelligence, then we have a question about what he knew about the transfer of detainees. The member's example is unfortunate, because it bolsters what I have been saying all morning. There is a legitimate question of whether the minister had information about the transfer of detainees who faced torture, which placed him in a conflict of interest. He has told three different versions of what his role was in Afghanistan, and he appears to have misled the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. That is what has caused Canadians, in large numbers, to lose confidence in the minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to acknowledge the work of our Canadian Armed Forces members who are on the ground helping people deal with the flooding in Quebec. We hope the situation will improve as soon as possible and with as little damage as possible. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

As a former soldier, I am pleased to speak to today's motion to give a voice to my former fellow soldiers and those who have no voice within the Canadian Armed Forces. The motion reads as follows:

That the House has lost confidence in the Minister of National Defence's ability to carry out his responsibilities on behalf of the government since, on multiple occasions the Minister misrepresented his military service and provided misleading information to the House.

We were forced to move this motion because the minister has not stopped misleading the House on a multitude of topics since taking office. No one can distort the truth for as long as he has and think that Canadians will continue to support him. Unfortunately, the jig is up for the minister, but he does not seem to be getting the message. He is hanging on to his position like someone who has nowhere else to go.

I would like to remind the Liberals that no one believes the minister. The men and women in uniform no longer believe him and they are ashamed of him. Canadians have lost trust in him as they have gotten to know him. The straw that broke the camel's back with respect to “alternative facts” was the mistruth in the speech given by the minister in India on April 18, when he again said that he was the architect of Operation Medusa.

Business of Supply

I said “again” because the minister said the same thing in a speech in 2015 during the election campaign, when he was still an active member in the reserves of the Canadian Armed Forces. Several members of the forces are wondering why he was not called out for violating the Canadian Forces' code. Taking credit for someone else's achievements is a clear violation of the code, but this second instance did not go unnoticed.

It is shameful to see someone who was not even close to the decision-makers claim credit for their work and decisions. We are still wondering why the minister misrepresented the facts to raise his own profile. Unfortunately, the minister did not answer that question. The people on this side of the House, as well as journalists and Canadians, are waiting for an answer. However, the Liberals are not interested in what Canadians want. Liberals have very loose ethics.

The minister apologized for misstating the facts about this file, but he also distorted the truth in a number of other files without ever apologizing or explaining why he used “alternative facts”. Today, I will give a few examples. We have spoken often about what happened in India or during the election campaign in 2015, when the minister proclaimed himself the architect of Operation Medusa. However, in the past 18 months, ever since the minister took office, many other important “alternative facts” have been presented in the House and elsewhere in the course of his duties.

There was much debate in the House over the withdrawal of CF-18s from combat missions against ISIS. No one could understand the reasoning. We asked questions, but never got any answers. The minister said that there was no problem and that our allies, the Iraqis and Kurds, agreed and understood that we would do more. The minister even said that the Iraqis asked us to do more, to help in ways other than the bombings with our CF-18s. The opposite is true. The minister seemed to be the only one who was happy to see the CF-18s withdrawn.

A few weeks ago, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade proved it by way of a formal statement. It said that, contrary to what the minister had been saying for weeks in the House, the Iraqis begged Canada not to do this. The Iraqis asked Canada not to withdraw the CF-18s and said that it was very important to keep up the air strikes. The minister said the opposite. That was the first “alternative fact”.

For months, we asked that our CF-18s be redeployed to Iraq, but the minister said that it was not important and that people did not want that, when a report from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade said the opposite.

• (1340)

The second important “alternative fact” from the short career of my hon. friend opposite as defence minister has to do with the capability gap. For months, the Liberals fabricated a capability gap within our air force. Throughout 2016, the commander of the air force, General Hood, said there was no problem, that we had enough aircraft to carry out the mission. In fact, the Conservatives had put \$450 million on the table to refurbish the CF-18s. General Hood said that, for the time being, he had the tools to do his job until 2025.

General Hood first mentioned this at the Standing Committee on National Defence. Shortly after that, the minister started talking

about this so-called capability gap. Through access to information requests, it quickly became clear that the problem had been fabricated by the people at Boeing, the same people who sell the Super Hornet, during meetings at the minister's office and even the Prime Minister's office. We have the facts; we know the dates. Two or three days after the meetings, a problem was raised in the House. The minister said that we cannot fulfill our NATO and NORAD missions because we do not have enough planes. On the one hand, we have the commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force saying that everything is fine, and on the other, after meeting with Boeing in offices here in Ottawa, the minister says we have a problem.

Thus, they created another “alternative fact”, a fake capability gap, instead of launching an open and transparent process to procure a new fleet of aircraft, regardless of the model. I am not here to sell one model over another. I am here to show that the defence minister has been inventing things for the past 18 months.

There is a third “alternative fact”. I am not going to speak again about what happened in India and during the election campaign. I am simply going to speak about what we have all witnessed in the past 18 months. This third fact concerns the hardship pay for our troops in Kuwait. From the beginning, the minister has said that it was the previous government that deployed our soldiers without that allowance. There can be nothing further from the truth. We have proof through written Question No. 600, which provides the facts and the details. It is clear. The Conservatives gave hardship pay to the troops deployed. There was a problem during the soldiers' deployment under the current Liberal government. The minister played with this and tried to blame the Conservatives. In the end, he granted half the pay, but not all of it. At present, our troops no longer receive this hardship pay. The government rises and tries to tell us whatever they want. However, it is written in black and white in Question No. 600. If he reads it a few times, he may be able to better understand it.

The minister once again tried to make up a story. We did our homework. My colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman asked questions before bringing this matter before the House. We submitted written questions to the Standing Committee on National Defence. We asked the minister in person to answer the question. He never wanted to do so, and he once again gave us “alternative facts”.

At some point, the government needs to stop taking us for fools. It needs to stop talking about the minister's military history. Like my NDP colleagues, we all agree with what the minister did in Afghanistan. We do not have anything to say about that. We do not know exactly what work he did on the ground, but we know he did an excellent job. That is not the issue. Like me, he is no longer a member of the military. He is a member of the House of Commons. As defence minister, it is his duty to ensure that his authority over the troops and his attitude are beyond reproach.

Over the past 18 months, we have been told four confirmed “alternative facts”. I am only mentioning four because I am short on time. The most recent alternative fact was the last straw for members of the Canadian Armed Forces. The minister claimed to be the proud leader of Operation Medusa. That does not make any sense.

Business of Supply

For all these reasons, the minister has lost all credibility. He lost whatever credibility he had. Yes, he is a man of honour. He is a soldier who had a wonderful career. However, as a politician, he missed the mark. We are calling for his resignation for all the reasons I just mentioned.

• (1345)

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking alternative facts, we are talking alternative reality for the hon. member. The only person who has actually come forward and spoken about the minister's role in Afghanistan has been Colonel Vernon. Colonel Vernon was the chief of staff to General Fraser during Operation Medusa. He said this on radio last week:

I've got no axe to grind, I'm a retired British army officer watching the Canadian press. I don't think so. The only person who could be vaguely annoyed by that is the Australian lieutenant colonel to whom [the minister] worked and actually I spoke to him yesterday and he's not at all miffed by it.

In fact he reiterated from Australia everything that I was saying.

So much for stolen valour. He reiterated everything that is being said:

You know, without [the minister's] input as a critical player, major player, a pivotal player I'd say, Medusa wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have had the intelligence and the tribal picture [put together].

Therefore, I ask the hon. member, what is this motion all about, other than an attack on a very honourable man?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, again, the former major did exceptional intelligence work in Afghanistan. Everyone recognizes that. That is not the issue.

Every soldier deployed on the ground and every reconnaissance platoon was tasked with bringing intelligence to the defence staff, who would then who would take that intelligence, come up with an operation plan, and put it into motion. We do not dispute that former Major Sajjan did that.

The former major is now Minister of National Defence. He said he developed the operation, he was the architect of it, and took credit for the whole thing. That is the problem.

They have to stop putting words in our mouths. We are not disputing the work that the minister did. We are disputing the fact that he is taking credit for the mission.

• (1350)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion says "misrepresented his military service". We know about the member of Parliament for Durham, who happens to be a candidate for the leadership of the Conservative Party. One site tells the story of his service. This is something that is endorsed by the leader. I will quote exactly what can be seen and heard on YouTube, "He served in the air force, where he flew Sea King helicopters on operations at home and abroad." I was an air traffic control assistant and I understand the difference between a navigator

and a pilot. The Conservative leader is trying to give Canadians the impression that he was a pilot.

I wonder if the member believes that the member for Durham should step aside as a leadership candidate because he is clearly trying to give the impression to Canadians that he was pilot.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, that is good example of this government's intellectual dishonesty.

My colleague from Durham never claimed to be a pilot. He has a uniform and he is campaigning to be leader of the Conservative Party. He simply wore a Royal Canadian Air Force uniform, but he never claimed to have played a role other than the one he assumed during his 12 years of service. It is quite dishonest of the government member to say that.

[English]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I just want to provide the context of what the commanding officer of the Minister of National Defence said about him after Operation Medusa. He said:

He was the best single Canadian intelligence asset in theatre, and his hard work, personal bravery, and dogged determination undoubtedly saved a multitude of Coalition lives.

My hon. colleagues do not want to listen to what General Fraser has to say.

Through his courage and dedication, [the minister] has single-handedly changed the face of intelligence gathering and analysis in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Liberals are trying to put words in our mouths. We have said 100 times that the minister did an excellent job at the time.

What we are saying is that as minister of defence, he made up a life that he did not live. That is the problem.

I was part of Operation Unique in 1991, and I was given an excellent evaluation. I was told that I was the best lieutenant and all sorts of other things. Do I make a big deal out of it? Do I say that I set up Operation Unique? No. I was a platoon commander at the time and that is all.

The Liberals need to stop putting words in our mouths.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we carry on with resuming debate, I will let the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil know that there are only about seven minutes remaining in the time before we start statements by members. I will interrupt him in the usual way and he will of course have the remaining time when the House next gets back to business on the motion.

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the start I want to say how much we are thinking about the flood victims in Ontario and Quebec and how much we thank our military people and other first responders for the work that they are doing.

Statements by Members

In October 2016, I was made critic for veterans affairs, and part of my responsibility was to continue on the good work of the member for Durham, the former critic, to restore relationships with our veterans. I can say, as somebody who represents CFB Borden or is in close proximity to CFB Borden, just how important that trust is to our men and women who serve this country. I never served my country, but I did serve my community as a firefighter. In a quasi-military organization, that trust is just as relevant as it is in our military.

The current government said that it was going to do things differently. Let me start by saying that it gives me no great pleasure to take a pound of flesh out of the Minister of National Defence, because I think he is a good and honourable man, and no one is discounting the service that he gave to our country. However, this is the government that ran on a mandate of transparency, on accountability, and on honesty. In fact, in the mandate letter that the Prime Minister wrote to the minister, he used the word “honesty” eight times and he used the word “accountability” six times. He used “honesty” in the context of the expectation that everything the Liberals do as a government and that he does as a minister will be done honestly.

Unfortunately, the minister has not lived up to the expectations of the Prime Minister. On not just one occasion but on two occasions, he misled the Canadian public on his role in Operation Medusa. I know the other side is arguing about the grammar that was used, but the fact is that he did it twice.

In lines of questioning last week, not only did we speak about the word “honesty” being used eight times in the minister’s mandate later but also about “accountability” being mentioned six times. This is about the trust, the respect, and the integrity that the men and women in our Canadian Forces have in the Minister of National Defence since this issue broke.

I have gone to several events in my riding, many of them attended by members of the military. I was at the Battle of the Atlantic commemoration this past Sunday in Barrie, and every single person I spoke to said, “What was he thinking? What was he doing?” I have sat in this House and I have heard the line of questioning and I see what is going on today. I look over at the Minister of National Defence. He knows he was wrong. He knows what he did was not right. He knows that our Canadian soldiers deserve somebody who is going to have their back, not somebody who pats himself on his own back, and I am placing direct blame not on the minister but on the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister does not know this is wrong. He is doing what he can to protect the minister. I believe that the minister, being an honourable man, knows that he cannot lead in his position anymore. Every time that minister steps onto a base, every time he steps onto a ship, every time he takes a flight, and every time he addresses our men and women in uniform, they will have what the minister did in back of their mind. This is the Prime Minister’s fault. It is the Prime Minister who is diminishing this man’s integrity and diminishing this man’s respect among our troops. If the minister knows what he did was wrong, he needs to do the honourable thing and that is resign. I believe this. I believe in the honour and integrity of the minister. I believe he knows that he needs to do this, but for some reason they are hiding him.

This past weekend, we saw the Minister of Transport running cover for the defence minister. This is no secret to us here in Ontario. We have seen a pattern of this in the Ontario legislature with the Ontario Liberals. They deny, deny, deny. They do not do anything about it. They do not take responsibility.

● (1355)

The current Prime Minister is not taking responsibility. He is the one who is putting the minister in this position, further diminishing his credibility, further diminishing his respect among the men and women of our services, and further diminishing his integrity. The Prime Minister is to blame for this situation continuing to go on the way it is, not the minister of defence.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NURSES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the first day of National Nursing Week. I am sure I am the first among many members in this place who will take an opportunity to speak about the enormous contribution to Canadian society of the nursing profession. The theme for National Nursing Week this year is #YESThisIsNursing and focuses on the evolving role that nurses play in Canadian society.

I should also make mention of the fact that this overlaps as well with National Hospice Palliative Care Week. All of us in this place are well aware of the need to expand care, palliative care particularly, in relation to the focus that this House placed last year on physician-assisted dying.

I want to also note that nurses have a real challenge increasingly with inadequate protection. They need more staff with them. They need to be sure that they are secure and safe in their workplace.

I want to close by thanking the nurses of Canada for everything they do to heal and take care of us.

* * *

● (1400)

DON COUSENS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to pay tribute to Don Cousens, the former mayor of the City of Markham, who recently passed away. He leaves behind a loving family, friends, a lifetime of notable accomplishments, and a community that is grateful for his many years of service.

Don was a lifelong learner who never shied away from a new adventure. Over the course of his life, he was an ordained minister, a high-tech executive, a politician, an advocate, and even a commandant in the Fort Henry Guard.

Statements by Members

For someone of Don's remarkable character and abilities, it was only a matter of time before he was drawn to public service. He spent nearly a decade as a school trustee and later was elected for four successive terms as mayor of Markham. He also served as an MPP in Ontario's legislature, first becoming deputy speaker, and then minister of correctional services.

His list of accomplishments is long, but among them are efforts to bring in anti-smoking legislation in Ontario, build Highway 407, and establish the Character Community Foundation, a charitable organization.

Don will always be remembered for his keen mind, his love of family, and his wonderful sense of humour.

On behalf of the Minister of Health and myself, may the House join with us in thanking Don for a lifetime of service.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN CADET PROGRAM

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks, I have had the privilege of being the guest of honour at many cadet annual reviews in my riding, and I can safely say that Canada can count on some extraordinary young people. Every year, the Canadian cadet program works with young people aged 12 to 18 to help them build confidence, boost their self-esteem, and enhance their knowledge.

What is more, these young people use what they have learned to give back to the community as volunteers. Canadian society as a whole benefits from their involvement.

Dear army, navy, and air force cadets from Windsor, Asbestos, Richmond, Warwick, Victoriaville, and even Daveluyville, I want to pay tribute to you today. The work you are doing today is teaching you leadership skills that will help you throughout your life. I have the utmost respect for your work and for the positive contributions you make to your communities. I want to congratulate you for that. I have no doubt that each of you has a bright future ahead of you. Well done, and keep up the good work.

* * *

[*English*]

NIAGARA FOLK ARTS FESTIVAL

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, running throughout the month of May each year, the Niagara Folk Arts Festival is the oldest continually running heritage festival in Canada.

Cultural communities from across Niagara will showcase their rich and dynamic cultures. Events, including the ambassador's ball, along with many open houses, will be held throughout the month, each displaying the unique culture of their hosts.

It is amazing to see long-standing participants, such as the Italian, Ukrainian, Polish, and German communities, showcase years of tradition which have been passed down to new generations. However, last year was truly a highlight for me being present to witness the festival's first Syrian open house. To see refugees who

not that long ago were fleeing war now standing up to showcase their heritage to their new neighbours was truly an honour.

Credit is due to Jeff Burch and his team, along with 28 cultural partners, who spend countless hours each year planning the festival. Together they provide residents with a window into the rich history and vibrant communities that have helped build St. Catharines over the past 141 years.

* * *

OVARIAN CANCER

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ovarian cancer is the most deadly women's cancer in Canada. Outcomes for ovarian cancer have not changed in 50 years. Treatments have not advanced significantly since the 1990s. Dollars being invested in ovarian cancer research are not enough, causing slow scientific progress compared with other diseases. Immediate investment in ovarian research to help save lives is required, as well as support for ongoing research to screen for ovarian cancer, and implementation of Bill S-201, an act to prohibit and prevent genetic discrimination, to empower Canadian women to use genetic testing.

It is about time we did more for the women living with this disease. Women living with all forms of cancers in my riding have to travel hundreds of kilometres and be separated from their families to get treatment in Saskatoon. We must help Ovarian Cancer Canada and the women it helps by increasing awareness for this cause today, May 8, World Ovarian Cancer Day.

* * *

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

MUSLIM ASSOCIATION IN MONTREAL NORTH

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, [*member spoke in Arabic*].

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to welcome to Parliament today members of the Association musulmane de Montréal-Nord, which is located in my riding of Bourassa.

[*Member spoke in Arabic*]

[*Translation*]

The association was founded in 1988 by members of the Moroccan community living in Montreal North. The association's goal is to preserve Muslim cultural identity, provide educational and religious services, and facilitate the integration of newcomers into the host society.

For more than 29 years, the association has been contributing to the harmony and community spirit of the riding of Bourassa. I commend its president, Abdelaziz Rzik, and also take this opportunity to extend the association's members a warm welcome to the House of Commons.

[*Member spoke in Arabic*]

*Statements by Members**[English]***CANADIAN FORCES**

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the public accounts committee heard details on the Department of National Defence's shortage of approximately 4,000 troops. The recent heavy rainfall and flooding and the deployment of hundreds of Canadian Forces personnel to assist communities highlights the importance of Canada having enough troops. I thank them.

I am very fortunate to have CFB Wainwright in my constituency. I have attended many of the graduations there. There is much pride for everyone involved, particularly the new recruits and their families. The Bold Eagle program has had great success providing first nations recruits.

Canadians should know that the Canadian Forces is not a secondary career choice; with pride, it can be a first choice. There are many positions waiting to be filled that include valuable training, experience, and professional qualifications for individuals.

Members of Parliament visiting schools talking about the importance of education and careers can play a role in bolstering the number of men and women recruits. If just 335 members of Parliament helped to encourage the recruitment of a dozen of their constituents, our Canadian Forces could reach their recruitment goals.

* * *

WESTRAY MINE

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was seven years old when the Westray mine exploded 25 years ago. I remember sitting in Mrs. Williams' class at Frank H. MacDonald Elementary School as we learned of the disaster that would break the back of my community. We all spent days watching the tragedy unfold, and hoped and prayed that the rescue workers would find the men alive underground. Our hope would soon fade as we learned that our community had lost 26 fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons.

After years of advocacy by members of the families who were affected by this disaster, Parliament passed laws to promote safer workplace environments. I commit that as long as I am fortunate enough to sit in this House, I will work to see those rules enforced.

To the families of those 26 men who were lost in the explosion a quarter century ago, we remember those loved ones on the sombre anniversary this week. As the monument at home in Pictou County reads, their light shall always shine.

* * *

ALBERT COLLEGE

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I offer a warm congratulations to Belleville's own Albert College, which celebrated its 160th anniversary as a renowned international university prep school. As Canada's oldest coeducational boarding and day school, Albert College has provided an enriched and comprehensive education to many students throughout its history. Currently, its campus focuses on a close-knit connection between the

over 300 students from pre-kindergarten to grade 12 and post-graduate levels, who are representatives of 20 countries.

Albert College's commitment to fostering academic excellence has been recognized for developing driven and engaged global citizens who confidently tackle diverse challenges beyond their educational attainments. The college emphasizes cultivating foundational values for character building and goal-setting, which are qualities that last a lifetime. In attending this ceremony, I was privileged to meet many Albert College alumni who were eager to return to join in the celebration of this milestone anniversary.

* * *

● (1410)

OVARIAN CANCER

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is World Ovarian Cancer Day.

Representatives of Ovarian Cancer Canada recently were in Ottawa seeking \$10 million to conduct life-saving research into this deadly disease. While survival rates for other forms of cancer continue to improve, survival rates for women with ovarian cancer have not improved for 50 years. Every day, five women lose their battle to ovarian cancer. This cancer is harder to detect and therefore it is harder to treat. Women often do not receive treatment until it is too late and the cancer has spread.

We need to do more to stop this disease that is killing our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters. We can and we will do more.

* * *

*[Translation]***WORLD OVARIAN CANCER DAY**

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize World Ovarian Cancer Day. Ovarian cancer affects thousands of Canadian women. It is estimated that 2,800 women will be diagnosed with the disease this year. Ovarian cancer is the most fatal women's cancer.

[English]

On September 10, there will be an Ovarian Cancer Canada walk of hope in Toronto, and there will be similar walks across the country.

Today, on the day of the walk, and every day, our focus should be on giving women hope. With additional research we can develop treatments and continue the search for a cure, and with that comes hope.

[Translation]

I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting Ovarian Cancer Canada, an organization that helps women who have this disease and their families, raises awareness, and raises funds for research.

More importantly, let us give some hope to all the women fighting ovarian cancer and all the survivors across Canada.

Statements by Members

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to honour Canada's mining and exploration industry, which plays a vital role in creating good jobs and supporting middle-class families, urban, rural, and northern regions, as well as indigenous communities.

Mineral development is a transformative industry advancing sustainable development and cutting-edge technology.

[Translation]

The mining industry in Canada is a processing industry that fosters sustainable development through the use of modern technologies. In order for this industry to continue contributing to our economy, budget 2017 extends the mineral exploration tax credit by one year.

[English]

Investments are needed in clean technology innovation to ensure we remain competitive and a global leader in northern Ontario and across Canada.

I ask all hon. members to join me in celebrating National Mining Week, and recognizing the importance of Canada's mineral industry and its workers.

* * *

[Translation]

FLOODING

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some people in eastern Canada are currently going through tough times because of Mother Nature's wrath, which has caused abnormal flooding in residential areas. Those affected are facing situations beyond their control that are putting their properties and belongings at risk.

I want to send their way all the energy they need to get through this. I am pleased once again to see the support, empathy, generosity, and help being offered by the families, neighbours, and people everywhere who are pitching in and helping. The response has been impressive, and I invite everyone to give to the Red Cross disaster relief fund.

I would like to point out that the men and women in uniform from CFB Valcartier were quick to respond. They deployed as soon as requests were made by the authorities. They are on the ground working to protect the assets in the areas affected by flooding.

Once again, I want to sincerely thank the thousands of people who are helping out. The solidarity of our citizens makes me proud to be Canadian. Together, we will make it through these hard times.

* * *

[English]

HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATION

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the National Holocaust Remembrance Day

ceremony being held today in Ottawa by the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem.

[Translation]

We remember and show respect for the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust. The sheer magnitude of that number is difficult to grasp.

● (1415)

[English]

Primo Levi, an Italian survivor of Auschwitz, warned us about the painful inability of language to express the horrors done, with whole generations wiped out.

Last month, while attending the Yom Hashoah remembrance ceremony in Toronto organized by the Adath Israel Congregation, I heard emotional stories from the survivors.

We must listen to the survivors. Their testimonies are a warning about what happens when divisiveness and hate are allowed to flourish. To them I say *le'olam, lo od*, never again, not in Canada, not anywhere.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank U.S. legislators who recently saved the Great Lakes from catastrophic budget cuts proposed by the Trump administration.

This bipartisan effort restored over \$300 million in critical funding for the Great Lakes. Unfortunately, the Liberal government is falling short of matching U.S. investments, and continues to consider storing radioactive nuclear waste on the shores of the Great Lakes.

U.S. legislators, like Senators Debbie Stabenow, Gary Peters, and Sherrod Brown, and Congressmen Dan Kildee and Paul Mitchell are some of the opposition leaders in the U.S. who vehemently expressed opposition to the plan.

Not only is it environmentally reckless, but it is an increasingly significant diplomatic irritant, with Canada developing a reputation as a "free rider" on the U.S. Great Lakes protectionist initiatives and investments.

Storing nuclear waste next to the Great Lakes should be scrapped. Millions of people, more than 200 municipalities, states, businesses, and environmental organizations have all lined up in opposition. All we need now is the Liberal Prime Minister, his cabinet, and the Liberals to do the same.

* * *

CALGARY HERITAGE

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my deepest gratitude to the people of Calgary Heritage for giving me the privilege to serve as their member of Parliament. It is truly an honour to be elected MP for this riding. I will strive to carry on the legacy of Stephen Harper and continue the riding's tradition of strong representation.

Oral Questions

I thank my campaign team and the hundreds of volunteers who have supported me. Without them, I would not be here. I thank my wife Sue and our children for their ongoing support and encouragement.

As the member of Parliament for Calgary Heritage, I will work hard to be a strong voice in my riding. My constituents have expressed many concerns to me and they have sent me here to deliver a message to the Liberal government: improve our economy, balance our budget, pay down our debt, build pipelines, secure our borders, and protect our fundamental right to free expression.

* * *

[Translation]

FLOODING

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all my colleagues, I would like to extend our heartfelt thoughts and prayers to everyone affected by the devastating flooding in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and New Brunswick.

We are going through a difficult period. We ask that everyone remain cautious while the volunteers support the efforts of our first responders. As we have seen in the images and stories being shared, communities are pulling together, whether it be to fill sandbags, provide meals, or offer shelter. The Government of Canada supports the officials on the ground as well as all the volunteers and first responders.

We thank everyone who has given their time, their energy, and their support. Together with my colleagues, I invite all Canadians to offer their assistance and their sympathy in recognition of the terrible situation many people are facing. We are at our best when we all work together to face a challenge.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, intense flooding is currently affecting thousands of Canadians across the country. It is forcing people from their homes in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick.

[Translation]

We hope that all Canadians facing these terrible circumstances will stay safe, co-operate with first responders and emergency services, and help their neighbours as much as possible.

[English]

Could the Prime Minister please update the House and Canadians on the assistance the government is providing to all Canadians who are caught up in this flooding?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

I want to say that our thoughts are of course with all Canadians affected by the flooding. We thank the first responders, as well as the volunteers who have been helping their neighbours and their communities for the past several days.

• (1420)

[English]

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has spoken to his counterparts in Quebec and Ontario, and officials continue to speak with authorities in New Brunswick and British Columbia, and, indeed, across the country.

I can confirm that approximately 1,650 Canadian Forces members were deployed and Ontario has also requested help with 250,000 sandbags, which are on their way.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence never explained to Canadians why on more than one occasion he exaggerated the role he played in Operation Medusa. We asked him several times to explain himself in the House, and the media also asked for explanations. Instead of answering the questions, the Prime Minister sent the Minister of Transport to do interviews on the defence minister's behalf.

If the Prime Minister does not trust his Minister of National Defence to do his job, then why should Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I still have full confidence in the Minister of National Defence. He has an exceptional record of service to his country, whether it is as a police officer, a soldier, a member, or a minister. I am very proud of the work he is doing to address the fact that, for 10 years, the Conservative government underinvested in our armed forces. Unfortunately, the armed forces did not have the equipment and support they needed to do their work. We plan to fix that.

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has let down countless Canadian Armed Forces members by exaggerating his role in Afghanistan, and he did it at least twice. When he was on active duty, I do not believe the minister would have ever resorted to such an exaggeration. It was only when he became a Liberal politician that he decided he needed to embellish this record.

When he was in the military, I assumed he would have never stood for this kind of behaviour, so why does he expect Canadians to accept it now? Why does the Prime Minister accept it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has an exceptional record of service to his country, whether it is as a police officer, as a decorated army veteran or, indeed, now as Minister of National Defence and MP. He continues to work very hard day in and day out to give to our troops the tools and the capacity they need to succeed.

Oral Questions

We continue to ensure we look at what our military needs. After 10 years of underinvestments by the previous government, we are about to give the valorous women and men who serve the tools and the support they need.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's infrastructure bank will take \$35 billion from taxpayers to backstop profits for well-connected investment bankers, pension fund managers, and their clients. The problem is that these same wealthy and well-connected one percenters are the ones actually helping set up the bank.

BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, is not just in the room giving advice to the Prime Minister; it is in the room to actually represent its clients.

Why can the Prime Minister not see this as the conflict that it is?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know a significant level of underinvestment has happened over years and, indeed, decades in Canada in our infrastructure. We got elected on a commitment to invest in Canada's communities, invest in our infrastructure, which is why we put forward a plan for \$180 billion of investments in infrastructure that is going to make a difference in Canadians' lives.

We also know there are greater needs even than that. Drawing in on different sources of capital so people can get to work and home on time, so people can get their goods to markets, and creating good middle-class jobs is a priority for us.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the fund managers are licking their lips. This is a blatant conflict. The Prime Minister has turned to BlackRock for all kinds of advice, setting up this bank. That is like the three little pigs hiring the big bad wolf to be their contractor.

Everyone can see the conflict of interest here. It is obvious. Thanks to the Prime Minister, the rich just keep getting richer. Who is going to stick up for the taxpayer?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the approach we have put forward over the past year and a half on infrastructure is in direct contrast to the approach of the previous government. We believe in collaboration. We believe in working with people. That is why we have been consulting with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, with unions and work groups, with private investors, but also with chambers of commerce to talk about the kinds of investments in infrastructure that are going to lead to good jobs for Canadians now and growth that is going to help Canadian workers, Canadian families, and Canadians, as we move forward in the coming years and even decades.

* * *

● (1425)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister appointed the Minister of National Defence. The Prime Minister told him to block an inquiry into the detainees scandal. The Prime Minister is responsible.

Back when the Conservatives were in power, Liberal after Liberal called for an inquiry. As soon as they formed government, all that ended. Why did the Prime Minister only support a request for an inquiry into the Afghan detainees scandal when the Conservatives of Stephen Harper were in power?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of treatment of prisoners is one that all members of the House take extremely seriously. That is why we are pleased that over the years there have been six different inquiries of different sorts into the Afghan detainee issue, including one ongoing right now.

Indeed, there was one inquiry that required one of our former colleagues, Stéphane Dion, to spend an entire summer poring through 40,000 different documents to analyze what had happened. That was an opportunity also given to members of the NDP. They chose not to participate. Apparently it was not a priority for them. It is a priority for us, and will continue to be.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in fact, upon completing this abridged analysis, Stéphane Dion said to the Conservatives, "When you read these documents, you will have questions to ask to your Prime Minister". There should have been an inquiry.

Not only do we have a minister of defence who is misleading us, but now the Prime Minister is following his lead.

If the Prime Minister really believes in transparency, and if he really wants to set the record straight, why is he still trying to block an inquiry into the transfer of Afghan prisoners?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, there have been six different inquiries of different sorts into this issue, including one that is still ongoing.

We will always focus our efforts on demonstrating that Canada takes the treatment of detainees very seriously. We will continue to work with those involved to ensure that Canada fulfills all its responsibilities and that it knows what happened and what we can do to ensure nothing like this ever happens again.

* * *

[English]

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is not now and there never has been a public inquiry into the transfer of Afghan detainees.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Thousands of people are watching helplessly as their homes are destroyed. These floods are making many homes unsafe, destroying memories, and ruining lives.

What tangible commitment is the government making to help those who have been affected by all of this devastation?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when I visited Terrasse-Vaudreuil, it was an honour for me to see how members of the community have come together. Neighbours and strangers pitched in and filled sandbags to prevent houses from being completely destroyed. It was a proud moment.

To date, we have sent 1,650 Canadian Forces members to help. We are sending sandbags, and we will also be there to help clean up and provide assistance in the days to come.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): That may be a tangible commitment, Mr. Speaker, but it does not amount to much.

[English]

Canadians are suffering through floods, from Kelowna, British Columbia; to Île Mercier in Quebec; to Saint John, New Brunswick. Some of the regions affected have never seen floods like this before, and many are worried about what will happen next.

Will the federal government commit here and now to fully support these communities in the aftermath of these terrible floods?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is there now to support the emergency situation that so many communities are facing, with neighbours, volunteers, first responders, and now Canadian Armed Forces there to pitch in to try to protect homes, cherished memories, lives. This is something we take very seriously, and yes, the federal government will be there in the coming weeks and months to work with communities facing cleanup, facing rebuilds. This is what Canadians do. We are there for each other in times of trouble.

* * *

● (1430)

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are. The warnings that we have been giving the government for months, have now become a reality. One of Canada's many lumber companies has announced that the jobs of 1,300 workers on the north shore, in Mauricie, and mainly in my region will be jeopardized by the Americans' decision to impose the infamous softwood lumber tax.

What is more, the provinces and now the mayors of Quebec are the only ones taking action, even though it is the federal government's responsibility to negotiate this agreement. It is up to the federal government. The provinces have so much confidence in the federal government that they appointed representatives. Now, the mayors are getting involved. Municipal mayors should not have to manage the softwood lumber agreement. However, the mayors of

Quebec will be going to Washington to talk about the impact of the tax.

When will the government do its job?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are maintaining our commitment to protect Quebec's forestry regime, and we will vigorously defend the interests of the softwood lumber industry.

As I told the Quebec minister, Ms. Anglade, and Richard Garneau last week, our forestry industry has never been found guilty. As I always say, we are seeking a good deal for Canada, not just any deal.

[English]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC) Mr. Speaker, what we have just seen shows what is important for the government. That was not in the mandate letter, and she is looking for the answer. That is not a priority for the government. Close to 400,000 people live from the forest industry. The Liberals do not have an answer to give to them.

[Translation]

An agreement needs to be negotiated as soon as possible. That is what the people want.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the softwood lumber agreement, speed is not what matters. What matters is to have a good agreement for Canada and Quebec. As I always say, and as Quebeckers and Canadians know full well, we are right on this issue. I am absolutely convinced that our forestry regime is just fine. We are prepared to defend, work, and even fight for our industry.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what do RBC, BMO, Goldman Sachs, and The Blackstone Group have in common with 35 executives from TD Bank, other than making massive profits last year? They have all received free Broadway tickets courtesy of the Canadian taxpayer. Would the Liberals like to explain how buying Broadway tickets for banking executives does anything to help the middle class and those working hard to join it?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I am having difficulty hearing. The hon. member for Huron—Bruce will come to order. I need to hear the answer.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs has the floor.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, *Come from Away* celebrates the warmth, generosity, and cultural accomplishments of Canadians. The tickets were purchased at a significant discount, and our guests included the brave, inspiring volunteers from Newfoundland. We were proud, as Canadians, to showcase our national values and our cultural accomplishments at this—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Oral Questions

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess that is why they invited a whole two people from Newfoundland to go to it.

Middle-class Canadians are having trouble making ends meet and trouble making sense of the Liberals' priorities. Heading to New York to see a Broadway play is not affordable for many Canadians, but the Prime Minister has no problem using taxpayers' dollars to buy tickets for lawyers and diplomats.

Could the Prime Minister explain how spending tax dollars on Broadway tickets for diplomats from Kiribati or Tuvalu benefits middle-class families?

• (1435)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud of the response of the people of Newfoundland to the tragedy of 9/11. It was a heartwarming demonstration of Canadian values. I am equally proud of the great work of Canadian artists in showcasing those Canadian values. I was very proud to be there, seeing our values, our warmth on stage, and you should be proud that Canada was showcased that way too.

The Speaker: I would be very proud. The hon. minister should remember to direct her comments to the Chair.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a blatant conflict of interest with the Liberals infrastructure bank. The Liberals gave private investors control over the development of the bank, costing taxpayers \$35 billion. This bank will now give a significant benefit to the exact same investors. P3 Canada already leverages private sector infrastructure dollars. The Liberal bank will not be transparent, it will not be accountable.

Why are the Liberals designing a bank that gives 100% of the rewards to its friends and leaves 100% of the risk to taxpayers?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the historic investments we are making in infrastructure to grow our economy, to create jobs for the middle class, and opportunities for those Canadians who work hard each and every day to be a part of the middle class.

The hon. member is absolutely incorrect. The infrastructure bank will be accountable to Parliament. It will be accountable to Canadians through Parliament. The infrastructure that we help support is municipal and provincial infrastructure. We consulted with the FCM, provinces, territories, unions, and labour organizations that—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we just found out something rather alarming. Federal officials, at the behest of the Prime Minister himself, worked closely with foreign investment firm BlackRock in order to ensure that the Liberals' infrastructure bank is attractive to billionaires from Abou Dhabi, China, and Saudi Arabia. Talk about conflict of interest.

Why are the interests of foreigners and billionaires more important to the Liberals than those of all Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, our goal is to support our municipal and provincial entities, to support the infrastructure that they need. We have put forward an ambitious plan of more than \$180 billion that we will invest. We also feel that we can do more for municipal and provincial sectors by engaging the private sector.

The hon. member may have something against private investments, but we do not. We feel that we can mobilize private capital to build more infrastructure that many Canadian communities need.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after all their campaign promises, documents reveal that the Liberals spent months with corporations designing the so-called infrastructure bank. The priority of these corporations is not providing infrastructure, but rather it is profiting off infrastructure. Shocker. The Liberals secretly co-wrote the rules of this privatization bank with the multinationals. This is a clear conflict of interest.

Will the Liberal government deny that tolls and service fees will be placed on Canadians so that corporations can get their cut?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that investing in infrastructure helps to grow the economy, create long-term growth, and jobs for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. That is why we have put forward a very ambitious agenda, including the mobilization of private capital to build more infrastructure. We understand that Canadian communities need infrastructure. They have been lacking that infrastructure. They have seen a decade of underinvestment by the previous government. We have a lot of catching up to do and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, BlackRock is reviewing the talking points, but it has not made them any better, that is for sure.

[*Translation*]

If anyone still has any doubt about the fact that this privatization bank is serving the interests of Liberal friends, they need only to look at the location that was announced this morning: Bay Street.

Studies and experts continue to question the government's approach and lack of transparency. The bank is not even up and running yet and the conflicts of interest keep piling up.

Can the minister tell us why he was in such a rush to announce the location of the bank before the bill to create it was even studied in committee?

Oral Questions

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see that every Canadian municipality has the potential to benefit from the bank, regardless of where the bank is located. We will support projects that are priorities of local communities, whether it is Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Montreal, or whichever city needs to build infrastructure.

Furthermore, by engaging private capital, we will free up federal government resources to build more affordable housing, to build more child care facilities, and to build more recreational facilities, as well as supporting our rural and northern communities with \$2 billion in funding that has—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even the Prime Minister does not trust the defence minister to speak honestly anymore and rolled out other Liberal MPs to talk to the media instead. According to the National Defence code of ethics, “being a person of integrity calls for honesty [and] the avoidance of deception”. It requires “the pursuit of truth regardless of personal consequences”. Even the Prime Minister's own code states, “Ministers... must act with honesty”. Based on these standards, can the defence minister honestly explain whether he has any integrity left?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first responsibility of the Minister of National Defence and our government is to look after our troops and ensure that they have the support, training, and equipment needed to carry out the missions they are assigned.

That has been the minister's objective for the past year and a half, and that is what he strives to do every day. One of the key elements of his mandate is to put together a new defence policy for Canada.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence violated section 5.3 of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Code of Values and Ethics regarding integrity.

On that topic, the code states that, to demonstrate integrity, individuals must be honest, avoid deception, and adhere to the highest ethical standards. Integrity requires honesty and candour in one's words and actions. It is especially important that leaders and commanders demonstrate integrity, because their example makes a particularly strong impression on their peers and subordinates.

The minister no longer has any integrity.

What does the minister have to say to that? Will he step down?

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence admitted last week that he made a mistake in describing his role. He retracted that statement and apologized earlier this week in the House.

In no way were the minister's comments meant to diminish the role of his former senior officers and comrades in arms. He gave them a heartfelt apology.

The minister is proud to have served his country as part of an extraordinary team of Canadian, American, and Afghan soldiers who successfully carried out Operation Medusa.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to answer my question.

Ministerial responsibility is a long-standing political convention in our political system. Ministers are honour-bound to uphold such conventions, or else resign.

From the outset, the Liberal government has repeatedly said that all that is required to end the crisis of confidence is an apology. This political approach is not in keeping with the convention we have in the House.

Why is the minister hanging on to his position, when it is obvious to all Canadians that he should resign immediately?

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is proud of the Minister of National Defence's service as an anti-gang officer in Vancouver, a reservist in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and especially as an innovative minister who has created a new defence policy, the first one in 20 years with such extensive consultations. It will ensure Canada's security and sovereignty, the defence of North America, and peace around the world.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, Canadians saw the transport minister giving political cover for the minister of defence in an interview about defence policy and spending, and that is exactly the problem. The Prime Minister may say that he has complete confidence in the minister, but the minister has lost the trust of our troops, and shielding him will not make this go away. It will not go away because every time that the minister steps on a base and faces our CAF members, every time he is on a ship, and every time he addresses them, this will follow him. Will the minister stand up in this House, do the right thing, and resign?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence is a former reservist. He will always hold in high regard the service of Canadian Armed Forces members, both those he served with during his missions and those who served under other commanders or at other times.

Today, it is the minister's responsibility to ensure that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces have all the equipment, training, and care they need to carry out their missions, abroad and in Canada.

Oral Questions

• (1445)
[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals want to severely restrict the ability of the parliamentary budget officer to initiate studies by requiring him to have a work plan approved by the Speakers of this House and of the Senate.

They also want to prevent members of this House from requesting cost estimates of government projects. That means previous reports on old age security, F-35 fighter jets, and crime legislation would simply not have been possible.

Is this what an independent parliamentary budget officer looks like to the government?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to providing greater independence to the parliamentary budget officer, and this is the overriding intent of the legislation recently introduced.

As we have clearly said, we are open to amendments and we look forward to the bill being sent to committee for a detailed study, where we can discuss the good ideas that have been put forward about changes to the office of the parliamentary budget officer.

Let us advance this bill. Let us pass it at second reading so that the committee can do the important work to advance the government's intent for an independent parliamentary budget officer.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): I have a tale to tell, Mr. Speaker. Once upon a time there lived a fellow who was very intelligent and very curious. He was also very good at math. He listened to the prince, made sure he did not say foolish things, and above all, he checked the prince's math. The young prince did not like that one bit. All he wanted was to be left alone, and so, he restricted the curious fellow's freedom to act and prevented him from looking into things he wanted to know more about.

Today, we have a Prime Minister who is going after the parliamentary budget officer. What exactly does the Liberal government have to hide from taxpayers?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to providing greater independence to the parliamentary budget officer, and this is the overriding intent of the legislation recently introduced.

As we have clearly said, we are open to amendments, and we look forward to the bill being sent to committee for a detailed study, where we can discuss the good ideas that have been put forward about changes to the parliamentary budget officer.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, flooding intensified over the weekend in many regions, not only in Quebec, but also in Ontario, British Columbia, and New Brunswick.

As my colleague mentioned, first responders will continue to play a crucially important role in ensuring the safety of those affected. We have seen extensive damage, as well as gestures of solidarity and cases of neighbours helping neighbours during this difficult time.

Can the Minister of Public Safety tell us how the government is supporting the affected communities?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts are with the people affected by these tragic events, including those whose loved ones have gone missing.

[English]

Since receiving Quebec's request for assistance on Friday, 1,650 Canadian Armed Forces personnel have been deployed. Yesterday Ontario asked for help as well, and we are getting them an extra 250,000 sandbags, as requested. We are also in touch with British Columbia and New Brunswick.

We will keep working with all provincial partners to provide all the help we possibly can.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, omnibus Bill C-44, introduced by the Minister of Finance, contains a virus. That virus directly attacks the independence of the parliamentary budget officer, which defies reason. The parliamentary budget officer is independent and must stay that way. With this bill, the Speaker of the Senate, who is not elected but appointed by the Prime Minister, will have veto power over the work of the parliamentary budget officer.

Can the Minister of Finance, who is an honourable man, explain such an unacceptable situation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, our government is determined to make the parliamentary budget officer more independent. We have also said quite clearly that we were open to amendments. We look forward to the bill being studied at length in committee and to discussing all the good ideas that we presented on the changes affecting the parliamentary budget officer.

Let us make sure that this bill gets through second reading stage today so that we can start the important work of improving the bill in committee.

• (1450)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is truly a shame that a man as distinguished and honourable as the Minister of Finance should become the architect of the Liberal government's dirty work.

Oral Questions

The government house leader just said that the government remains open to good ideas. We happen to have one. Would the government kindly remove from the omnibus bill all clauses pertaining to the independence of the parliamentary budget officer? I imagine that several Liberal ministers know that attacking the independence of the parliamentary budget officer makes no sense. If they know that, then let them do something about it.

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said time and time again, our government is committed to an independent parliamentary budget officer who reports to Parliament. That was the intent behind the legislation that was recently introduced.

We are encouraging all members to work together. Let us pass second reading of this legislation. Let us send it to committee so the study can take place so we can improve the legislation to ensure the intentions of the government, which is to have an independent parliamentary budget officer, are fulfilled. Let us work together to make that happen.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary budget officer's job is to blow the whistle when the government cooks the books and calculate what spending schemes will actually cost taxpayers, yet the budget bill will give the Prime Minister's hand-picked Senate Speaker a veto over the work of the budget watchdog. With billions in new spending schemes and three decades worth of promise-breaking deficits ahead, why is the government trying to lock up the budget watchdog?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we said during the campaign and as we continue to say, we would like to advance the independence of the parliamentary budget officer. We actually thanked the parliamentary budget officer for his analysis of the provisions of Bill C-44. We look forward to working with him and others to improve the bill to ensure we accomplish the objective of an effective and independent parliamentary budget officer.

I have said to the member and to all members, let us pass this legislation at second reading. Let us send it to committee so we can advance the independence of the parliamentary budget officer. We do this together.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Syrian refugee plan was supposed to cost \$250 million. Instead it cost \$1 billion. The Liberals said their deficit would only be \$10 billion. It is more than double that. They said the budget would be balanced by 2019. Now it is 2055.

To a government that cannot count, there is nothing more terrifying than a man armed with a calculator. Why are the Liberals silencing the one person who can give them desperately needed help with remedial math?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is actually entirely the opposite. What our government is saying is that we support the independence of the parliamentary budget officer. Where the previous government had the parliamentary budget officer responding and reporting to the

Library of Parliament, we are saying the parliamentary budget officer should respond to Parliament, to members of Parliament.

That is why we are saying to let us work together to improve the legislation. Let us pass it at second reading. Let us send it to committee so the committee can do its important work.

We are open to amendments. I will continue to repeat that until members provide some constructive feedback to improve the legislation for the independence of the parliamentary budget officer.

* * *

[Translation]

SHIPPING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, whereas Canadians dealing with flooding were pleased to see the army, residents of Yamachiche, victims of huge waves apparently linked to shipping, are still wondering what the Minister of Transport is waiting for to launch an investigation. The two-metre waves that are damaging homes are certainly no act of God.

Someone, somewhere must be responsible. Does the minister plan to quickly launch an investigation and tell victims what recourse they have?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of safe and environmentally sound navigation. We are aware of the situation in Yamachiche and can confirm that we have received complaints about this incident. We are currently assessing the situation, and the investigation is still under way.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix fiasco continues. People's whose resources are stretched to the limit are coming to my office, desperately asking me to do something. For example, a mother waited for seven months for her maternity benefits. Many retirees have been owed large amounts for months. That is unacceptable.

What more will it take before the government finally takes action and finds a solution for these people who are experiencing financial difficulty and stress through no fault of their own?

• (1455)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, as parliamentary secretary and as member for Gatineau, I take problems with the Phoenix pay system very seriously, as does the government.

We are taking additional steps to help people, for example, by giving them money and by allocating additional human resources. It is unacceptable that families are affected by this sort of situation.

Oral Questions

What we will not do is what the Conservatives did. We will not create false savings of \$70 million, and we will not lay off the very same 700 employees we need to solve the problems with the pay system.

* * *

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are motions in front of the immigration committee to study the illegal border crossing crisis. This urgent situation is straining resources of the RCMP, the CBSA, provincial housing, legal aid, and health care services. Canadians are confused as to why the Liberals shut down debate on this matter not once but twice.

Would the chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration please update Canadians as to when this urgent will be debated at committee, or are the Liberals just going to keep shutting it down over and over again?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows well, it is the committee itself that decides what studies to study and which studies they will study in the future. Presently we are studying immigration consultants, an issue of tremendous importance, and the House mandated us to do an Atlantic immigration study, which we will be doing throughout the rest of this session and into the fall.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I get the feeling that many Canadians will not be satisfied with that answer.

The Prime Minister could be doing many things to address this issue, including closing a loophole in the safe third country agreement. Instead, the Liberals have announced a whole—wait for it—\$30,000 for first responders in Manitoba. For those counting, that is a whopping \$609 more than they just spent on Broadway tickets for wealthy investment bankers.

My question simply is this: can the Prime Minister stand up and tell Canadians why his priority is Broadway and not the border?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our priority is applying Canadian law and keeping Canadians safe. In fact, crossing the border in an irregular fashion is no free ticket to Canada. Those people are apprehended, they are identified biographically and biometrically, and their information is checked against data systems in Canada as well as internationally. If there is a danger, they are detained and they go before the IRB to hear their claims, and if their claims cannot be justified, then deportation proceedings are commenced. The law is applied, as are Canadian treaties.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Liberals dither, the Prime Minister has even gone so far as to dismiss the safety concerns of our border communities, calling those asking for his help “fearful and closed in.” This is precisely the arrogant attitude that is frustrating so many Canadians, and it is why the

Prime Minister needs to actually talk to those on the front lines of this crisis.

Will the Prime Minister commit right now to visiting Emerson to speak directly with the families impacted by his inaction?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some weeks ago, it was my privilege to visit Emerson. I had the opportunity to meet with the reeve and the council. I had the opportunity to meet with many of the citizens there.

I noticed that members of the opposition paid a visit last week. It is interesting that a good many of the citizens of that community challenged the opposition members for the kind of attitude that they were displaying on this issue.

It is important to respect Canadian law. It is being enforced in every way. It is also important to honour Canada's international obligations in the proper treatment of asylum seekers. We are applying both in a measured way.

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PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians need immediate investments in their communities' public transit systems so that they can get to work on time and get home at the end of a long day. In Mississauga, many residents lose hours every day due to congestion because their transit system is in need of improvements.

Would the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities update this House on the investments this government is making in Mississauga transit?

● (1500)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville for his hard work.

On May 5, our government announced more than \$58 million for 57 public transit projects, alongside with the Government of Ontario and the City of Mississauga. These investments will allow the city to buy new buses and install 100 additional bus shelters to the transit service in the city.

* * *

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend at the Alberta beer fest, literally hundreds of craft brewers, distillers, and Canadians were asking me why beer, wine, and spirits are not part of the Canadian free trade agreement. They were asking why, rather than supporting a policy that will ensure that Canadian entrepreneurs can be successful, the Liberals saddled them with a tax hike that will increase each and every year.

Oral Questions

The Liberals have a chance to do the right thing. They have a second chance to stand up for the Canadian economy. Will the Liberals act as an intervenor in the Supreme Court case on Canadian free trade? Will they help free the beer?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we pursued a very clear path, working with the provinces and territories, in helping liberalize alcohol. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I do not consume alcohol, but this is a priority for me and our government, and this is why we worked very closely with the provinces and territories to make sure it was part of the Canadian free trade agreement. This historic agreement is going to, again, create an environment that is going to help businesses and consumers. It is going to provide more choice and better price points for consumers.

With regard to alcohol, we are going to continue to work with the provinces in a manner that is going to be productive, thoughtful, and progressive, a good result for Canadian consumers.

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CANADA POST

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals clearly broke their election promise to restore home mail delivery across Canada, but at the very least, in communities like mine, in Windsor and Tecumseh, they committed to bring back door-to-door delivery and remove the poorly and hastily installed megaboxes. Thousands of households in my community alone are still waiting. Seniors are counting on the government to fulfill this important promise.

It has been over a year and a half, so what is the holdup?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, our government delivered on its promise to suspend the conversion to community mailboxes and to undertake a full and thorough review of Canada Post. We thank the task force that worked so diligently on this issue. We thank, as well, the parliamentary committee, the response to which we have just recently filed. The government continues to deliberate on this matter and will be furnishing a full response later this spring.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's strong support for the arts is very important to my constituents and all Canadians. What steps is the government putting in place in order to provide Canada's cultural innovators with opportunities to work and collaborate with one another in order to further their art and create economic opportunities together?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth for her continued advocacy and support on behalf of the arts in her riding and around the country.

Our government is committed to the arts. We are committed to supporting creative labs and to bringing artisan creators together to work and grow. That is why we have invested \$5.25 million in the Artscape Daniels Launchpad to give creators and entrepreneurs

access to spaces, tools, and technology, plus the skills and opportunities needed to innovate and thrive in today's creative economy.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Ambassador McCallum said, in reference to an extradition treaty with China, "We've agreed to talk about the issues that need to be addressed for China or any other country to meet our high standards", but on Friday, the parliamentary secretary said, "There are no extradition negotiations."

If talking to the Chinese government about the extradition treaty is not negotiating that very same treaty, then would the Liberals give an honest answer and explain what these non-negotiation talks are about on extradition with the Chinese government?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the protection of human rights is an integral part of our government's foreign policy. Canada and China are not extradition partners, and there are no extradition treaty negotiations. As with all cases internationally, our government's commitment is to the protection of human rights, the rule of law, and due process.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I too want to let flood victims know that our hearts go out to them. We thank the volunteers, the municipal workers, and the soldiers who are all doing an amazing job.

Mayors in Quebec know that they cannot count on the Liberal government to stand up for Quebec softwood lumber. That is why they have organized their own mission to Washington for the Union des municipalités du Québec. Ottawa is paralyzed and invisible. If we were independent, this would not be happening.

When will the Prime Minister finally grant loan guarantees?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the Conservative government that allowed the agreement to lapse.

The countervailing duties imposed by the U.S. commerce department are punitive and unfair. We will challenge them before international tribunals and we will win, as we have in every previous case. I repeat, we want a good deal for Canada, not just any deal.

Routine Proceedings

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the Minister of Foreign Affairs that considering the 1,300 workers from the north shore, from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, from the Mauricie who just lost their jobs, there is no doubt that the softwood lumber crisis is already hurting us badly.

I have a message for the 40 Liberal members from Quebec, including the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, who voted in favour of \$2.9 billion in loan guarantees to pay for this fiasco, the unfair competition of Muskrat Falls.

Now our forestry industry is under attack. Will you stand up to defend it and insist on what everyone in Quebec, except you perhaps, is calling for, namely loan guarantees?

The Speaker: I would remind the member to address her comments to the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has been working for months, not only across our government but with our provincial counterparts from virtually every region of the country, knowing that there would be a countervail imposed against the forestry sector by the United States that is punitive and unacceptable. We are looking at strategies that in the short term will look at workers who may lose their jobs. We are looking at producers, who will be very concerned about their capacity to continue their operations, and in the longer term, to make sure that an expansion of markets and transition in the industry will mean that there will be a long-term future for the forestry sector, so important to all of Canada.

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[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the bank that was announced this morning is a windfall for the world of finance. Our infrastructure, roads, water, and waste water systems will be privatized and cost taxpayers more. Even worse, Toronto banks will pocket the profits. Some believed that the bank would be located in Montreal, but this is Bay Street's government.

Why is the government so intent on having the infrastructure in Montreal, Quebec City, and our regions line the pockets of Toronto's bankers?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, regardless of the location of the bank, every community has the potential to benefit from the Canada infrastructure bank. We have put forward a \$180-billion infrastructure plan to support communities of all sizes from coast to coast. Less than 10% of that will be delivered to the infrastructure bank. The rest of the money will flow through provinces, territories, and municipalities through other agreements. We believe that infrastructure is a strong foundation for growing our economy and creating jobs for the middle class.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[English]

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a document entitled, "Proposals to correct certain anomalies, inconsistencies and errors and to deal with other matters of a non-controversial and uncomplicated nature in the Statutes of Canada and to repeal an Act and certain provisions that have expired, lapsed or otherwise ceased to have effect".

I understand that this document is deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for study.

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology entitled "Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Statistics Act".

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs entitled "Main Estimates 2017-18: Vote 1 under Canadian High Arctic Research Station and Votes 1, 5, 10, L15 and L20 under Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development".

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[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find consent for the following motion.

[Translation]

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, May 9, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

ALGOMA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who have stayed at the Windmill Campground in Thessalon, Ontario, located on Cranberry Lake in the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time, year-round employees are treated as and considered small businesses and are taxed as such.

ALGOMA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on Algoma transportation with regard to rail. The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Transport to ensure that they actually have passenger rail transit for environmental, economic, and other reasons.

The petitioners would like to see this done as soon as possible, as the region has suffered without the use of a passenger rail system.

FIREARMS

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition with regard to the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee, which was created to ensure that the views of Canadians were heard when changes were considered to firearms policies, laws, and regulations and that the committee would include firearms experts and representatives of the gun industry in Canada to advise the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness on those views when considering these items.

The majority of the new members of the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee have publicly stated that they are in favour of stricter gun controls or are in fact members of the Coalition for Gun Control. Only two members of this committee have a firearms background.

These Canadian citizens are petitioning that law-abiding target shooters, hunters, trappers, farmers, and collectors have increased representation on the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee.

● (1515)

AUTISM

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Autism Leadership Summit took place in Ottawa a month ago. I rise today to continue to raise awareness of this important cause and to present a petition created by a young constituent from Beaches—East York. Emily Kalbun has been hard at work to not only raise awareness but to invite a direct change for autistic children, based on her own experience. Her petition, which gathered close to 1,500 signatures, is calling for autism treatment and therapy to be treated as a free, essential service.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as members know, I have risen in the House on a number of occasions on petitions similar to this one, which is a petition to the Minister of Transport from people who used to take the Algoma passenger train. The petition is signed by people from Sault Ste. Marie, Richards Landing, Awers, Echo Bay, and North Bay.

They emphasize the importance of this rail and the fact that it used to get a \$2.2-million subsidy and the economic return was over \$48 million. They emphasize that the few industrial roads they are able to use are maintained only when and if industries need them. The roads are not for public use, and not everybody can access them.

The petitioners also indicate that the cancellation infringes on the federal government's obligation of consultation with first nations. They are asking the Minister of Transport to put the Algoma passenger train back in service in order to ensure the mission of Transport Canada to serve the public interest through promotion of a safe, secure, efficient, and environmentally responsible transportation system in Canada.

There was also a huge fundraiser in Sault St. Marie just last month, with Ian Tamblyn, which raised quite a bit of money for this. The petitioners are serious about getting the train back on track, and they are hoping that the Minister of Transport will look at this file much more closely.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 943, 944, 946, and 948.

*[Text]*Question No. 943—**Mr. Arnold:**

With regard to the government and Department of Fisheries and Oceans' public consultation sessions related to the review of the Fisheries Act in the 2016-17 fiscal year: (a) what were the locations and dates of all consultation sessions proposed and held; (b) who were the participants in each session; (c) what were the total expenditures of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans associated with each session, broken down by item and type of expense; and (d) what were the total expenditures of other departments associated with each session, broken down by item and type of expense?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary for Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada committed to review and restore confidence in Canada's environmental and regulatory processes and initiated a comprehensive review of these processes. The review was focused on the federal environmental assessment processes; modernizing the National Energy Board; and restoring lost protections and introducing modern safeguards to the Fisheries Act and the Navigation Protection Act. Consultation with Canadians was at the core of this review. The first public consultation event on these four reviews, led by Natural Resources Canada, was an online questionnaire that was available from June 20 to August 31, 2016, for all Canadians to participate. With respect to the review of the changes to the Fisheries Act, a total of 467 participants provided their opinions as part of this online questionnaire.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans undertook a subsequent public consultation that focused on the 2012 amendments to the Fisheries Act. This included online consultation held from October 16 to November 25, 2016, and consideration of over 360 pieces of relevant correspondence, including over 156 written submissions, received by the department between April 2016 and February 2017. The online consultation received more than 15,000 visits, and 1,682 participants registered to contribute to the online consultation process.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans did not undertake any face-to-face consultation sessions related to the review of the changes to the Fisheries Act during the 2016-17 fiscal year. In-person consultations are planned for 2017-18 fiscal year.

With regard to (a), Natural Resources Canada received feedback through the online questionnaire about the Fisheries Act from individuals from every province between June 20 and August 31, 2016. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans heard views and opinions through the online consultation held from October 16 to November 25, 2016. The Department considered all relevant correspondence received by the Department between April 2016 and February 2017 from individuals from every province and territory across the country.

With regard to (b), participants from various sectors of Canadian society, including indigenous peoples, the general public, government—i.e., federal, provincial, and municipal governments—non-government organizations, academia, law associations, and industry associations participated in Natural Resources Canada's online questionnaire and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' online consultation.

With regard to (c), The total expenditures of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans associated with the online public consultation related to the review of the Fisheries Act for the 2016-17 fiscal year was \$203,378.44 plus applicable taxes. This included the following activities: preparation of the strategy and plan, \$33,780.00; creation, development, and testing of the online engagement platform, \$67,657.50; conducting the initial round of online consultation, \$20,775.00; preparation of consultation summary and analysis, \$17,285.00; preparation of the reports and searchable database file, \$57,970.00; and translation of the report into French, \$5,910.94.

With regard to (d), the total expenditures for Natural Resources Canada's online questionnaire related to the review of the changes to the Fisheries Act for the 2016-2017 fiscal year was \$8,280.00 for the preparation of consultation summary and analysis. Questionnaire design, programming, hosting, and weekly reporting were carried out using existing departmental resources. Translation of the report into French was an additional \$3,113.05.

Question No. 944—**Mr. Arnold:**

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' funding in the fiscal year 2016-17 to review the Fisheries Act and to enhance monitoring and reporting of existing projects permitted under the Fisheries Act: (a) what government and non-government entities received funding for these activities; (b) what were the amounts of funding delivered to each entity; (c) for what activities or services was each disbursement of funding intended; and (d) what was detected by the enhanced monitoring and reporting of existing projects permitted under the Fisheries Act?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary for Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), (b), and (c), with respect to the funding that supported the review of the changes to the Fisheries Act in fiscal year 2016-17 and to enhance monitoring and reporting of existing projects authorized under the Fisheries Act, \$4,985,822 was allocated.

For government entities, \$2,685,822 was allocated. One portion of the disbursement was for departmental support of the review, including to support the minister; engagement with provinces/territories, indigenous groups, and the Canadian public; the management of the funding program to support the participation of indigenous groups; and analysis of input, including the report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. A second portion was for departmental support of departmental and ministerial communication and support in the development of web-based information for public consultation and communication. A third portion was for departmental staff to support the development of enhanced monitoring and reporting processes and approaches. This included funding related to salaries, benefit programs, internal costs, and accommodation and operating costs.

For non-government entities, \$2,300,000 was allocated. One portion was for operating costs associated with the development of the online public consultation tool. Funding for the development of the online public consultation tool was contracted out. Costs associated with this consultation have been detailed in response to Question No. 943 on March 31, 2017. A second portion was for funding the participation of indigenous groups in the form of contribution funding. Details of recipients, amounts of funding, and activities were provided in response to Question No. 945 on March 22, 2017.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to (d), in the fiscal year 2016-17 the funding allowed for work focused on a comprehensive analysis of monitoring data collected for 2015-16. The goal of this analysis was to assess current monitoring practices, understand the data that is collected during existing monitoring activities, and identify areas for modernization and improvement of monitoring practices. Preliminary results from the analysis indicate that most project proponents are complying with the provisions of the Fisheries Act and with regulatory requirements imposed by the department. Where compliance concerns were identified, the department worked with proponents to address the issues through voluntary compliance measures. The department is currently updating its procedures to produce quantitative reports on compliance rates.

Question No. 946— **Mr. Shipley:**

With regard to debt and deficit forecasts: (a) what is Canada's current annual debt and deficit forecast, broken down by year for the next 40 years; (b) does Finance Canada have debt and deficit forecast models in the event of a lowering of Canada's credit rating; (c) if the answer to (b) is affirmative, what are the projections of the forecast models, broken down by revised credit rating?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the Department of Finance presented its "Update of Long-Term Economic and Fiscal Projections" in December 2016. The projections can be found at www.fin.gc.ca/pub/ltefp-peblt/report-rapport-eng.asp. The department will publish updated long-term projections in the fall. Budget 2017 presented updated budgetary balance and debt forecast until 2021-22 and can be found at www.budget.gc.ca/2017/home-accueil-en.html.

With regard to (b), members may refer to pages 261-264 of budget 2017 for analysis of the sensitivity of the budgetary balance to various economic shocks, including changes in interest rates.

With regard to part (c), part (c) is not applicable.

Question No. 948— **Mr. Warawa:**

With regard to the government's projection presented on page 253 of Budget 2017 showing a 4% increase in Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues from 2016-17 to 2021-22: (a) upon what basis is the government's projection based; (b) how much of this forecasted increase will result from an increase in the GST rate; and (c) how much of this forecasted increase is the result of provincial carbon taxes, prices and levies?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the government's projection of goods and services tax revenues published in budget 2017 is based on projected growth in taxable consumption, projected growth in the GST/HST credit, and year-to-date results.

With regard to (b), the federal GST rate of 5% is maintained over the projection period; therefore, none of the increase in GST revenues is due to a change in the federal GST rate.

With regard to (c), overall, GST revenues are projected to grow broadly in line with forecasted nominal gross domestic product, or GDP. By definition, this would reflect the impact of carbon taxes on prices, although a separate estimate of the GST revenue impact is not available.

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 938 to 942, 945, and 947 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 938—**Mr. Lobb:**

With regard to the acquisition of cardboard cutouts of the image of the Prime Minister or any Cabinet Minister, since November 4, 2015: (a) how many cardboard cutouts has the government purchased; (b) whose image is on the cutouts; (c) how much did they cost and what are the expenses associated with them, broken down by individual purchase; and (d) who approved the purchase of the cardboard cutouts?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 939— **Mr. MacKenzie:**

With regard to processing times for refugee applications: (a) what is the average processing time for refugee applications from the moment of initial contact with the Canadian government through the final notification that the application was either granted or denied; (b) what are the various steps which every refugee application must go through; and (c) what is the average processing time broken down by individual step referred to in (b)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 940—**Ms. Rempel:**

With regard to the development of Snapchat filters developed by or for the government, including agencies, crown corporations, and other government entities, since November 4, 2015: (a) what amount has been spent developing the filters; (b) what is the description or purpose of each filter; and (c) for each filter developed, what are the details, including (i) the amount spent on development, (ii) the date of launch, (iii) analytic data or usage rates, (iv) campaign which filter was developed for, (v) locations where filters were available?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 941— **Mr. Sorenson:**

With regard to mandate letters for the Minister of Democratic Institutions: (a) how many mandate letters has the current Minister received; (b) what are the dates on which each letter was received; (c) what are the contents of each of the letters; and (d) if copies of the letters are available online, what is the address where each letter is located?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 942— Mr. Dubé:

With respect to the acquisition and retention of data, including associated data, metadata, bulk data, or any other kind of data by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS): (a) how many internal data repositories does CSIS have access to; (b) what are the different kinds of internal data repository to which CSIS has access; (c) are there any data repositories that have been accessed by CSIS, whether internal or external, that are housed within servers that do not belong to CSIS; (d) what is the difference, according to CSIS, between the terms “associated data” and “metadata”; (e) what is the exhaustive list of organizations with which CSIS shares information, including bulk data, metadata, associated data and any other data to which CSIS has access; (f) what is the exhaustive list of organizations, including telecommunications companies, financial institutions, government departments, and other organizations, with which CSIS communicates for purposes other than the sharing of information; (g) when were Cabinet Ministers informed of CSIS’s collection of bulk data, and with relation to their notification, (i) who were those Ministers, (ii) what were the forms of communication through which they were informed, (iii) what were the dates on which each Minister was informed, starting from January 1, 2006, until December 31, 2016, inclusively; (h) when were Cabinet Ministers informed of the methodologies employed by CSIS for the purpose of the collection of bulk data, (i) who were those Ministers, (ii) what were the forms of communication through which they were informed, (iii) what were the dates on which each Minister was informed, starting from November 4, 2015, until the present time; (i) with respect to the bulk data that CSIS has collected or otherwise has or has had access to, does it include (i) communications metadata, (ii) travel information, (iii) passport data, (iv) law enforcement wiretaps, (v) arrest records, (vi) financial transactions, (vii) information collected from social media, (viii) medical data, (ix) other kinds of bulk data that CSIS have access to; (j) what are the descriptions of all the different methods through which this bulk data is collected; (k) what is the exhaustive list of sources of bulk data that CSIS has access to, and how many times were bulk data collected starting from January 1, 2006, until December 31, 2016, inclusively; (l) how many judicial warrants were given to CSIS for the purpose of acquisition of bulk data starting from January 1, 2006, until December 31, 2016, inclusively, and when were these warrants received by CSIS; (m) how many (i) telecommunications companies, (ii) financial institutions, (iii) medical institutions, (iv) airports, (v) other companies, were compelled or requested to provide access to bulk data, associated data, metadata or any other kind of data to CSIS; (n) what are the kinds of leverage that CSIS employs in order to request or compel the acquisition of data from external data suppliers, (i) how many judicial warrants were obtained by CSIS for the collection of such data from private entities, (ii) has CSIS ever collected or had access to any such data without obtaining judicial warrants beforehand; (o) how many government departments or agencies were compelled or requested to (i) transfer bulk data, associated data, metadata or any other kind of data to CSIS, (ii) grant access to such data to CSIS, starting from January 1, 2006, until December 31, 2016, inclusively; (p) how many judicial warrants were obtained by CSIS for the collection of such data from government departments or entities, and has CSIS ever collected or had access to any such data without obtaining judicial warrants beforehand; (q) how many investigations has the use of bulk data helped in during the period starting from January 1, 2006, until December 31, 2016, inclusively, and how many individuals were the subjects of these investigations; (r) how many datasets or data repositories are housed within the Operational Data Analysis Centre, and how many of these data sets or data repositories include bulk data; (s) how many datasets or data repositories are housed in internal CSIS servers; (t) what are the approximate percentages of (i) bulk data, (ii) associated data, (iii) metadata, (iv) any other data that are housed within the servers mentioned in (s); (u) what is the description of the SMART data collection methodology employed by CSIS, and what kinds of data does this methodology collect; (v) what are all the steps involved in obtaining validation of authority to collect any kind of data; (w) has all information collected by CSIS since November 3, 2016, passed the “strictly necessary” test, as stipulated in Section 12(1) of the CSIS Act; (x) has all information retained by CSIS since November 3, 2016, passed the “strictly necessary” test, as stipulated in Section 12(1) of the CSIS Act; and (y) in light of the ruling by the Federal Court of Canada on the illegality of the retention of associated data by CSIS, delivered on November 3, 2016, what are the changes that CSIS has undertaken in order to ensure that the policies and practices of CSIS comply with the Court’s ruling?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 945—Mr. Arnold:

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans’ contributions in the fiscal year 2016-17 for the Participant Funding Program’s activities associated with the government’s review the Fisheries Act: (a) who were the recipients of the funding through the Participant Funding Program; (b) what amount of funding did each

recipient receive; and (c) for what activities was each disbursement of funding intended?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 947— Ms. Benson:

With regard to the quality of service provided by the Ministerial Enquiry Unit and MP Unit of Citizenship and Immigration Canada: (a) what is the total number of full time staff for each unit, and what are their job designations; (b) what training is provided to staff in preparation for responding to inquiries from MP offices; (c) are there regularly scheduled training or briefing sessions to keep the unit staff current on ministry policies and practices, and if so, how often do these occur; (d) do both units get the same training, and if not, what are the differences; (e) how do job descriptions and the mandates of these two units differ; (f) does one unit, or both, have the mandate to review files and to push for a timely resolution; (g) do these two units work collaboratively on files, and if so, how is information shared and updated; (h) who is ultimately responsible for incorrect information given to MP offices, i.e. what is the chain of command, or organizational chart for these two units; (i) what is the process for reporting instances of incorrect information given to MP offices; (j) what is the process or mechanism for reporting and fixing a problem in the system identified by an MP office; (k) what are the service standards for processing applications and security checks and verifications; (l) what remedy is available for cases that have gone beyond the service standards and timelines, and if difficult cases are moved to a different unit for treatment, are they then subject to a different set of protocols and service standards; (m) what are the protocols and service standards for applications originating from remote areas; (n) where services are not available, or not available in a timely fashion in a remote or less-served area, are applicants then given information on faster options (e.g. in a larger urban centre) that may be available to them; and (o) are all applicants given the same options and information, or is this a flexible standard, depending on the agent or officer?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all other questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate. I wish it were about some other subject matter, but it is what it is. I see it as nothing more and nothing less than a vicious attack on the integrity of our Minister of National Defence.

Canadians should know that this is the hon. Minister of National Defence, PC, OMM, MSM, CD, MP. He is a minister whom the Conservatives have devoted an entire day to attacking. Apparently, there was nothing else in this country to discuss other than the integrity of this very honourable man.

Government Orders

He was a police officer with the Vancouver Police Department, and he was not there just to hand out tickets. He was very involved in investigating gangs and drug trafficking, certainly the most difficult of the most difficult policing tasks.

Simultaneously, he was a reserve officer. He did four tours, one in Bosnia and Herzegovina and three in Afghanistan. Canadians should know what all those letters behind his name mean.

His fellow soldiers and commanding officer recognized his immense contributions to the forces by awarding him the following: Officer of Military Merit, awarded in October 2012 and invested in June 2014; Meritorious Service Medal, military division, awarded in August 2012; South-West Asia Service Medal, with clasp Afghanistan; General Campaign Star, with South-West Asia ribbon and two rotation bars; Mention in Dispatches, awarded in June 2008; NATO service medal for former Yugoslavia; Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal; two Queen Elizabeth II jubilee medals; Canadian Forces' Decoration, one clasp; Commendation Medal from the United States of America; chief of the defence staff commendation; and a deputy minister award from the Department of National Defence.

I have had the honour of standing with the minister at various military occasions, whether on a ship, on a wing, or in the base. I have to say, I am incredibly proud to have stood with and beside this minister. When he stands there with his rack of medals, the soldiers, the airmen, and the flyers all know that this is legitimate stuff. In fact, his service goes beyond the awards of these decorations.

I forgot to mention that I am splitting my time with the hon. member for Kanata—Carleton.

Because of the minister's extensive service, when he walks into the Pentagon, or into the department of defence in Germany or Great Britain, there are warm handshakes and slaps on the back, because he knows these people. He has served with these people. He is respected by these people, and there is not one of them who has said anything about the subject matter of this debate today.

He made the unfortunate choice of using the word “architect” in a recent speech, but we should first of all notice that those who have been denouncing him have all been anonymous so far.

Second, he has apologized not just once, not just 10 times, not just 20, and no apology seems to be sufficient. The opposition members have devoted an entire day to trying to destroy his reputation, but unlike his anonymous critics, critics who have not served in Afghanistan, who have not served in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and who have not patrolled the streets of Vancouver, there are some who have spoken up, for instance his commanding officer in Afghanistan, General Fraser.

● (1525)

He said:

He was the best single Canadian intelligence asset in theatre, and his hard work, personal bravery, and dogged determination undoubtedly saved a multitude of Coalition lives. Through his courage and dedication, [the minister] has single-handedly changed the face of intelligence gathering and analysis in Afghanistan.

He went on to say:

He tirelessly and selflessly devoted himself to piecing together the ground truth on tribal and Taliban networks in the Kandahar area, and his analysis was so

compelling that it drove a number of large scale theatre-resourced efforts, including OPERATION MEDUSA, a large scale conventional combat operation that resulted in the defeat of the largest TB insurgent cell yet identified in Afghanistan, with over 1500 Taliban killed or captured.

As if that is not enough, he went on further to say:

I rate him as one of the best intelligence officers I have ever worked with—fearless, smart, and personable, and I would not hesitate to have him on my staff at any time in the future. I have advised my chain of command that the Canadian Forces must capture his skillset, and seek his advice on how to change our entire tactical intelligence training and architecture to best meet the needs of future deployed units fighting in extremely complex battle space.

Others have spoken up. One is retired British army Colonel Chris Vernon. He was chief of the headquarters that ran Operation Medusa. He was one below General Fraser. He acknowledged the major role that was put together by the Minister of National Defence. He said:

...without [the minister's] input as a critical player, major player, a pivotal player I'd say, Medusa wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have the intelligence and the tribal picture to put the thing together.

Why are we debating the difference between “the” and “an”? The words used are “integral”, “critical”, “no single architect planning cell”. Without this picture, I do not think it would have happened. He spoke the language to go where we could not go.

The stolen valour is from whom? Is it from General Fraser? I do not think it is General Fraser. Is it from Colonel Vernon? Is it from his colleagues in the planning of Operation Medusa? The over-the-top enthusiasm on the part of the opposition is nothing more and nothing less than an attempt to destroy the reputation of an honourable man.

We have among us a genuine Canadian hero, and he has done nothing worse than what we would reasonably describe as a verbal miscue. It has backfired on the Conservatives because now they know that we have the quality of the man and the depth of his contribution and experience in this role.

I have always been honoured to stand beside the minister, and I am even more honoured to do so today. The Minister of National Defence is being attacked by people who know little or nothing about his role and the complexities of battle.

After he has apologized dozens of times for misspeaking, we have to start to wonder whether this is about the apology or about the ones who are asking for the apology, because apparently no apology will be good enough.

● (1530)

Frankly, I find it quite disappointing that we should spend an entire day debating the character of an honourable man, who has been described by his commanding officer and the chief of staff, from their observations while under intense pressure, as a “soldier's soldier”. It is a shame to watch the opposition attack a soldier's soldier.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during his speech, the member suggested that members from this side of the House had only put up examples coming from anonymous sources. That is not true. We spoke about retired Lieutenant-General William Carr, who said that the defence minister's search for recognition was a national embarrassment. We also spoke of retired Major Catherine Campbell, who has also spoken on the subject, and she is quite disappointed.

Government Orders

The member also said the same thing when the MP for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles gave his speech. He accused us of talking against the service of the minister. That is not the case. We are arguing that the minister has falsely exaggerated his role during Operation Medusa in Afghanistan. We are not talking about his honourable service to our country, but to his false exaggeration of being the architect of Operation Medusa.

When will the member correct his statement?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how one falsely exaggerates this. I rate the minister as one of the best intelligence officers with whom I have ever worked. He is fearless, smart, and personable. I would not hesitate to have him on my staff again. I have advised my chain of command that the Canadian Forces must capture his skill set and seek his advice on how to change our entire tactical intelligence training and architecture to best meet the needs of future deployed fighting units in extremely complex battle situations. How is that exaggeration? That is a commendation of great honour.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I share in the deep sadness of the discussion we are having in this place. In the work I have done with the defence minister, I felt he was very honest, that we had meaningful conversations, and that he cared deeply about the people I represented from CFB Comox. Therefore, it is a sad day for me personally to be here.

The reality is that we have seen the government flip-flop on the issue of the Afghan detainees. While the government was in opposition on this side of the House, it supported an inquiry. It is important to remember that there has been no public inquiry. This is about full transparency and disclosure. How can the Liberals reconcile the three different versions that the minister of defence has given of his role in Afghanistan? If they cannot, will they admit that the minister has more to explain than just his exaggerated claims in India?

• (1535)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, five inquiries have been completed. A sixth inquiry is under way. When we were in opposition, we were given the Afghan detainee documents. The hon. Stéphane Dion spent the entire summer, along with Bryon Wilfert, though I believe I could be corrected, examining the documentation.

When I asked the same question of the NDP representative, he said that the NDP was offered the same opportunity to examine the documents but it did not want to be muzzled. Therefore, rather than the truth, the preference of the New Democrats would be to be able to speak publicly. That is a choice. They made that choice. However, that is the way it came down.

The hon. member has explained himself to the Ethics Commissioner on whatever occasions she has asked, and for whatever reason she appears to be satisfied. It will be a sad day when the House appropriates to itself the opportunity to examine any one of us on “ethical claims”.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to speak on the motion, but I would really rather be in my riding, where I have spent the last three days with 600 of my closest friends,

filling sandbags and looking after community members. However, I thought this was such an important discussion that someone had to rise in the House to talk to this with a degree of understanding of the situation.

There are many veterans in the House, on all sides. I was one of the veterans who had the opportunity to serve in Afghanistan. I have a very interesting perspective on what was happening.

It is important that we all take the time, especially the veterans who are in the House, to understand what we are doing when we conduct this kind of motion, especially when we use language that is beneath the honour and the dignity that is inherent in the House. We can have discussions and we can have disagreements, but this is the House of Commons, the people's House, and we need to set the example and have those kinds of discussions in such a way that Canadians can have pride in what happens in this room.

I thank all the members who are here, especially those with military service. I am truly proud to have a minister of national defence who brings decades of experience, both as a reservist and as a police officer. He has served with such dedication in his career and has received so many accolades.

The minister's deep understanding, his ability to co-operate, to collaborate, to work with academics, foreigners, experts, and members of the House from all sides is exactly the kind of person we need to be acting as our Minister of National Defence. I will discuss this more in detail later. However, it is really important to hear the words of others who have served with this man.

Brigadier General David Fraser has said he is “one of the most remarkable people I have worked with”. He goes on to say that he was one of the best single Canadian intelligence asset in theatre:

Through his courage and dedication, [he] has single-handedly changed the face of intelligence gathering and analysis in Afghanistan...tirelessly and selflessly...his analysis was so compelling that it drove a number of large scale theatre-resourced efforts...I rate him as one of the best intelligence officers I have ever worked with...

We have heard these words before: “fearless, smart, personable, dedicated”. That is an incredible endorsement. We do not hear that every day. It is only the best of the best who get that kind of ringing endorsement. The minister has earned the high praise of our coalition partners.

I love the article by Chris Vernon. If members have not read the article, they need to read it. He is a British army officer who served as General Fraser's chief of staff in Afghanistan. He says:

[He] was a major player in the design team that put together Operation Medusa. He was able to put together an intelligence picture of the Taliban...without which we probably wouldn't have been able to mount Operation Medusa...but he was . He worked hand in glove with the Australian lieutenant colonel who was the lead planner.

He continues, calling our minister's role at the time “more than integral” and “a critical member of the planning and design team”. He goes on to say, “It was quite a small discrete group because we didn't want it too wide in the early stages.” He says that without his input as a critical player, a major player, a pivotal player, Medusa would not have happened. He said that he also played a big part in the execution of the operation on the ground, again, to great effect.

Government Orders

The role of our Minister of National Defence was so critical to this mission that the chief of staff to the ranking officer said that Medusa would not have happened without the work of the Minister of National Defence.

● (1540)

I am very proud of our Minister of National Defence and so are Canadians.

Later, I will check my Facebook and come up with a list of the names of people who have contacted me and said “Give the MND my best” or “Tell him we have his back.” Maybe my hon. colleagues opposite and I can compare numbers, because I am not hearing the same thing they say they are hearing. Our minister is dedicated to our women and men in uniform. That is indisputable. His actions speak louder than words.

I am proud to be a member of this government. We have a lot of work to do and the present Minister of National Defence is exactly the man we need to do that work.

I will end with a couple of wise words from my mother, because I learned a lot from my mother. She said to me that the only people who did not make mistakes were people who did not do anything. She said, “Get out there girl” and that when I made a mistake, to stand up, own it, take responsibility for it, apologize, and move on.

Trust is like a bank account. We make deposits into that bank account over the years by being credible, by working hard, by being predictable, by being there for people, by serving, by putting other people first. Once in a while we make a mistake. Even when I was a squadron commander, I made a mistake. I had to make a withdrawal from that trust account. Because I had spent years making deposits, I had something to withdraw against.

The Minister of National Defence has accepted his mistake. He has owned it. He has taken responsibility for it. He has apologized for it. Now the most important thing he needs to do is to carry on and do the important work we need done in order to improve the lives of the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and to better serve all the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech.

Like me, she is very familiar with the military system since she was a colonel and appointed commanding officer of a squadron. She is also familiar with the “Code of Service Discipline” and the “Code of Values and Ethics”.

Does my colleague agree that in 2015, when the Minister of National Defence was campaigning while still in service as a lieutenant-colonel, he was shamelessly taking credit for being the architect of Operation Medusa? Does she agree that this could at least have been grounds for being charged with conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline?

● (1545)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Minister of National Defence owned up to his mistake and he apologized.

One of my favourite definitions of leadership was written by John Quincy Adams, who said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” That is exactly the kind of leadership our Canadian Armed Forces needs.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way spoke about the central role that the Minister of National Defence played in Operation Medusa due to his intelligence work. We in the NDP do not dispute that statement. However, given the minister's knowledge of intelligence in Afghanistan, how could he not be aware of the treatment of detainees? Why does he not tell the House what he knows, or if he feels he is in a conflict of interest step aside so another cabinet minister can lead an inquiry?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly, the Afghan detainee issue started in about 2006-07. It all depends on what part of the country they were in. That happened over 10 years ago. There have been a number of investigations done accordingly. Being such a large country, somebody's role cannot really be pinned down by date because we were normally there for just three or six months at a time.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are tired of being sandbagged by the government. When the flooding started in eastern Ontario, I called the associate minister of defence who said he was too junior and he was going to pass it up the line to the minister. Meanwhile, the minister was in New Delhi talking about how proud he was to be on the main assault during Operation Medusa.

My question is more of a comment. I wish also that the member had not had to do the sandbagging. I wish the minister had been doing his job, answering the call when the first call from Canadians came, and maybe then she would not have had to spend her weekend sandbagging.

Nobody is calling into question that the minister was a great soldier, but he is a terrible minister.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I am good, but I cannot yet quite control the weather.

I did exactly the same thing. I called and I learned the process. The process is that it comes from municipality. The municipality talks to the province, and then the province talks to the federal government. We ironed out all those processes.

I had contact with people who could give me the updated situation. Things did change and evolve over time, but as far as I know, it depended upon the municipal authorities. They are the ones who would declare what was needed. They would pass it to the province, and we would provide it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

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Mr. Speaker, it is with a particular degree of sadness for the state of parliamentary democracy in Canada that I rise on behalf of the women and men of CFB Petawawa, located in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, which is in the heart of the upper Ottawa Valley.

It is a sad day for democracy that it is even necessary to have today's debate. However, no debate in the halls of Parliament is more important than defence of democracy and parliamentary tradition. The motion of my hon. colleague, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, can be summed in one word: honour.

Today's debate is all about honour, and in this case, lack of honour. The Minister of National Defence refuses to respect parliamentary tradition and resign from cabinet. The motion talks about losing the confidence of this House, but really this motion is about losing the confidence of the people the Minister of National Defence was appointing to serve in uniform as members of Canada's Armed Forces.

The minister has betrayed his constituents the first time he misrepresented his record of service, his party, his leader, this House, and his country, and the next time he dishonoured Canada by repeating this misrepresentation on an international stage. Without a doubt the worst by all is that by misrepresenting his service record during Operation Medusa, he is dishonouring every other soldier caught in the web of deceit, particularly those brave soldiers who lost their lives in Operation Medusa during the war in Afghanistan and the friends and families who are left to mourn those fallen soldiers.

The year 2006, when Operation Medusa occurred, was a tough year for Canadians during the war in Afghanistan. Military analysts referred to this period as having some of the fiercest combat Canadians troops had ever seen since the Korean War. More Canadians were wounded or killed in action during that year than in any other single year of the nine years of combat in Afghanistan.

As a member of Parliament in 2006, I found that year was particularly tough on our local community, as it was soldiers in Garrison Petawawa, in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who bore the brunt of casualties during the operation, principally the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment, which is based at Garrison Petawawa.

I want the Minister of National Defence to reflect on who he is dishonouring by refusing to follow democratic tradition and resigning.

As I continue with this debate, I ask all members of Parliament to join with me in paying respect to the brave Canadian soldiers who paid the supreme price, our most precious gift from the Creator, with their lives, in the service to their country during Operation Medusa.

Operation Medusa began on September 2, 2006.

The first casualty, on September 3, was Private William Jonathan James Cushley, aged 21. He was a member of the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, Petawawa, Ontario. His hometown was Port Lambton.

His friends and comrades said he exhibited strong leadership qualities, a fierce love of family, and a sense of fun.

He is survived by parents Errol and Elaine and three sisters.

There was also Warrant Officer Frank Robert Mellish, aged 38. He was a member of the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, Petawawa, Ontario. His hometown was Truro, Nova Scotia.

A long-time auto racing fan and dedicated soldier, Mellish is survived by his parents; wife Kendra, who still serves in the Royal Canadian Air Force; and two young boys. He was buried in Summerside, P.E.I.

There was also Warrant Officer Richard Francis Nolan, aged 39. He was a member of the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, Petawawa, Ontario. His hometown was Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Nolan was described as an adventurous soul who enjoyed riding bulls. He had a strong belief in family values and loved playing with his children and stepchildren. Friends said he would help anyone in need. He is survived by partner Kelly, three sons, a stepdaughter, and a mother.

There was also Sergeant Shane Stachnik, aged 30. He was a member of the 2 Combat Engineer Regiment, Petawawa, Ontario. His hometown was Waskatenau, Alberta.

Former high school buddy Randy Trenchuk remembered playing hockey with Stachnik, a combat engineer, and the frustrations with Shakespeare that they shared in English class. Stachnik, described as being dedicated and fun-loving, was to be married the next summer. He is survived by his parents, Hank and Avril.

On September 4, Private Mark Anthony Graham, aged 33, was killed. He was a member of the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, Petawawa, Ontario. His hometown was Hamilton.

Graham was a member of Canada's Olympic 4 x 400-metre relay team in 1992. Comrades talked about his imposing physical size, warm smile, and great singing voice.

He had three brothers, one of whom also joined the military, and a young daughter.

On September 18, 2006, four Canadian soldiers were killed and 10 injured while on foot patrol in the Panjwai district after a man on a bicycle detonated a suicide bomb packed with ball bearings.

● (1550)

The attack came near the end of Operation Medusa being declared.

There is Corporal Glen Arnold, age 32, 2 Field Ambulance, Petawawa, Ontario, whose hometown was McKerrow, Ontario. Arnold was a medic who had served in Bosnia-Herzegovina and with the Disaster Assistance Relief Team in Sri Lanka following the 2004 tsunami. He loved playing hockey and was a devoted family man. He is survived by his wife Kerry, four children, parents, three brothers, and a sister. "We miss you so much...and can't wait to see you home for Christmas", his wife Kerry Arnold wrote September 6, 2006, on a Department of National Defence website that relays messages to soldiers.

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There is Private David Byers, age 22, 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Shilo, Manitoba. His hometown was Espanola, Ontario. A friendly man and video game enthusiast in his high school days, Byers was killed before his fiance, Chantal Roy, was to give birth to their child. He is survived by Roy, his parents, and a brother.

There is Corporal Shane Keating, age 30, 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Shilo, Manitoba. His hometown was Dalmeny, Saskatchewan. Keating was described by his comrades as good-humoured and hard-working. He is survived by his mother, Judith Budd. "Nothing is worth losing a son but everything—everything—is worth a man willing to take that risk and to die for what he believes in", she told reporters in Saskatoon three days after her son's death.

There is Corporal Keith Morley, age 30, 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Shilo, Manitoba. His hometown was Winnipeg. An animal lover and proud owner of a dog named Lokie, he is survived by sister Shannon and his mother Della. "Keith served two tours of Bosnia in 2001 and 2003. He served his country with pride and certainty that missions there and in Afghanistan would better the lives of the people in those troubled nations", Della Morley told reporters before her son's September 29, 2006, funeral in Winnipeg.

On September 29, 2006, while out on a routine foot patrol along a Canadian-built road in the Panjwai district, Private Josh Klukie died after stepping on a booby trap and triggering an explosion. Another soldier was injured. Private Josh Klukie, age 23, was with the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, Petawawa, and his hometown was Shuniah, Ontario. Charming and charismatic and with a passion for sports, Klukie was an enthusiastic member of his high school basketball team. Klukie is survived by his mother and brother.

On October 3, 2006, two Canadian soldiers were killed and five injured after coming under attack in the Panjwai district of Kandahar province. The Taliban were armed with mortars and possibly rocket-propelled grenades. The soldiers were working on clearing a route for a future road construction project.

There is Sergeant Craig Gillam, age 40, with the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Petawawa, Ontario, whose hometown was South Branch, Newfoundland and Labrador. He was a man who led his troops by example and whose bravery saved many lives on the day he died. He participated in sports such as hockey and tae kwon do with his children. "Craig was a loving father and husband, a dedicated soldier, and a proud Newfoundlander", Gillam's wife Maureen said in a statement before his October 14, 2006, funeral. Gillam is survived by Maureen, two teenage children, and his parents.

There is Corporal Robert Mitchell, age 32, with the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Petawawa, whose hometown was Owen Sound, Ontario. Known to his friends as Jim, Mitchell strived to be the best. He is survived by wife Leanne, two sons, a daughter, and his parents.

These are the real heroes of Operation Medusa. I have had many conversations with soldiers and their families since this latest Liberal government scandal erupted. They all agree with the following assessment: having grossly inflated his role in one of the largest Canadian military operations in recent history, the Minister of

National Defence should have resigned. Failing that, he should have been fired.

Members of the military have a term for doing the honourable thing. It is called "falling on your sword". It is time for the minister to fall on his sword.

● (1555)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could not disagree more with the member opposite, and in fact the opposition day motion. To the degree in which we are debating it today, I, like one of my colleagues, am very disappointed. Let me quote the British Army officer Colonel Chris Vernon in reference to our Minister of National Defence. He said, "without [the major's] input as a critical player, major player, a pivotal player I'd say, Medusa wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have the intelligence and the tribal picture to put the thing together."

There are many heroes who were on that scene, and we do not question that whatsoever. Why does the member, and members of her caucus, continue to verbally attack someone, who from my perspective and from the perspective of many, if not the vast majority, does not deserve something uncalled for?

● (1600)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, quite apart from the stolen valour, Canadian Armed Forces personnel feel betrayed by one of their own. The 42nd Field Artillery Regiment has lost four weekends of class A funding. There were great hopes when the minister was appointed. If anyone should understand the chronic underfunding of the reserves, it should be the minister. Now the reserves are paying the price.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the opportunity to hear about so many people who have fought for our country. We must always remember those who have served and lost their most precious gift, their lives. I thank the member for reminding us of that today.

Again and again on this side of the House, we are hearing very important quotes about the amount of intelligence and information, and the key role that the defence minister played. Given that the Minister of National Defence's role in Afghanistan most likely was as an intelligence officer, do the Conservatives believe that the minister was in a conflict of interest when he decided to quash a public inquiry into the transfer of prisoners by Canadians to face likely torture in Afghan custody?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the future will roll out whatever answer that eventually has with respect to the people who were imprisoned in Afghanistan, the people who were killing our soldiers. However, for now, it is a matter of the gross exaggeration by the minister partnered with his other great misrepresentations.

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One that comes to mind is that when he took away the air cover for our ground troops in Iraq, he said that the allies had no problem with it, yet we learned some months later that they begged them not to take away the F-18s. Now we have a made-in-cabinet capability gap, so that the current government can sole-source a new fighter jet, instead of going the proper route as was promised during the election in having a full, open procurement and tendering process.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, when I asked the member to respond to a specific quote from a British Army officer Colonel Chris Vernon, instead she made reference to the fact that we had a reserve that did not get enough money. That was the response. When the Conservative Party took office, \$18.7 billion was being spent on defence. When they left office, it was \$19.2 billion. It was 1.19% of the GDP. It actually decreased in terms of the GDP.

Would the member not agree that she should have been more transparent with those individuals in saying that the Conservatives did not adequately finance our Canadian Armed Forces or our reserves?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, after a decade of darkness, when the Conservatives came in, we got five C-17s. We got our own lift. We did not have to beg, borrow, or lease. We got 15 Chinook helicopters. We got tanks again. We got light armoured vehicles, and reinforcements.

No one is questioning the minister's former military service; we are questioning his ability and his actions since becoming minister, which have been abysmal. Since he has become minister, the funding for the military has gone not from 0.9% but to 0.88%, the lowest in history in NATO.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by simply saying that the Minister of National Defence must resign, not only because of numbers or political decisions, but because of ministerial responsibility, a very important constitutional convention in this country. Since he does not want to follow that convention, we need to use an opposition day today to call for his resignation, which is coming soon. By the end of my speech, members will understand why.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the men and women who serve their country in the Canadian Armed Forces for the hard work they do every day, as demonstrated recently when they took quick action to help address the flooding in many regions of Quebec and Ontario.

I would also like to thank the members of the 6th Field Artillery Regiment, with whom I had the honour of serving our country, for the dedication they have shown since the regiment was created to the homeland and in every conflict.

Like my other opposition colleagues, today, I want to talk about our motion, which reads as follows:

That the House has lost confidence in the Minister of National Defence's ability to carry out his responsibilities on behalf of the government since, on multiple occasions the Minister misrepresented his military service and provided misleading information to the House.

This is really very serious. It all began with earlier issues, which I will talk about shortly. First, I want to explain a little about what has

brought us to this opposition day, namely Operation Medusa, which took place in Afghanistan in 2006.

The minister's political career began recently, in 2015. Before the November 2015 election, he was still in the Canadian Armed Forces. In a speech in New Delhi, India, for the second time in his political career, he stated that he was the main architect of Operation Medusa. This was not an inadvertent error, since he had made the same false statement, the same exaggeration, previously, during the 2015 election campaign, in an interview with a journalist.

Operation Medusa was one of the most important operations conducted by the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan. It has contributed to our national pride, since it was a success, according to a majority of analysts.

Since making that false statement, the minister has been severely criticized for this lie by the media, the opposition, and numerous active or retired members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Today, my colleagues have clearly shown this by referring to a number of retired members of the military who are disappointed and stunned by this minister's conduct.

What is unfortunate, but what reinforces our position on this opposition day, is that the Minister of National Defence is setting a trend in terms of how he performs his ministerial duties.

Right at the beginning of his term as minister, in December 2015, when the newly elected government decided to end our CF-18 campaign in Iraq, the Minister of National Defence held talks with certain members of the Iraqi government. When the minister returned to Canada, we asked him several times whether he had actually heard any comments about the withdrawal of our CF-18s in Iraq, and he said that was not the case. However, thanks to the good work done by journalists, we recently learned that, on the contrary, the Iraqi government had informed the minister on numerous occasions of its concerns regarding the withdrawal of the CF-18s. That is the first point on which the Minister of National Defence misled us.

The second example of the trend that the minister is setting relates to Kuwait. We have armed forces personnel in Kuwait, and, since October 5, 2014, they have received tax relief that was put in place by the Conservative government, as is often the case for other missions.

•(1605)

Responding to questions on the Order Paper, the Minister of National Defence acknowledged that the Conservative government had in fact put that tax relief in place. In spite of the minister's clear statements saying that members of the military deployed in Kuwait were entitled to tax relief offered by the previous Conservative government, he kept saying, several months later, falsely, that those soldiers were deployed without receiving tax relief from the Conservative government. Why did he change his mind? Did his parliamentary assistants not bother to tell him that he had signed a paper saying that in the House? That is probably what happened, and that is another example of incompetence.

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The third thing that further highlights the minister's pattern of misleading conduct toward Canadians and the House is our fighter fleet's lack of capacity. There is no such thing. The commander of the air force, Lieutenant-General Michael Hood, said when he appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence, as my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles who sits on that committee and was there can attest, that there was no lack of capacity when it comes to Canada's fighter fleet.

I have given three flagrant examples that show that the minister has misled the House of Commons, the parliamentarians who must vote for or against the government's decisions. His pattern seems quite obvious to me, and that brings me to the second part of my speech.

I want to come back to the convention of ministerial responsibility. If there is one fantastic thing bequeathed to us by mother England, and its fantastic mother of parliament, Westminster, it is ministerial responsibility, which rests, first and foremost, on the honour of a man or woman, the honour of serving and of acknowledging that, when the time comes, he or she must resign from his position or her position.

I have to say that Canada has an interesting history when it comes to ministerial responsibility. I am going to give all the examples of ministers who have resigned, since 1867, for reasons ranging from the trivial to the most serious.

I thought that the change in the political culture that had taken place since the 1950s should have meant that very few ministers had resigned recently. We treat politicians as we treat products of mass consumption: we toss them out when they are no longer good. Contrary to what I thought, until this millennium, ministers have had the courage to resign for much more trivial reasons than we are currently discussing in the case of the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Galt, one of the founders of the nation, resigned in 1867 because he no longer had the support and confidence of his cabinet colleagues, who held his policy responsible for the collapse of the Commercial Bank of Canada.

In 1878, Mr. Vail, defence minister, resigned because he had violated ministerial directives by being a shareholder of a company that had received government printing and advertising contracts.

In 1907, the minister of railways and canals, Mr. Emmerson, resigned because he had been accused of going to a Montreal hotel with a person of ill repute. Is that not unbelievable?

In 1965, the secretary of state of Canada, Mr. Lamontagne, resigned because he had been accused by the opposition, not by a court, of being involved in the scandal relating to a bankruptcy close to the prime minister.

Mr. Dupuis, a minister without portfolio, resigned in 1965 after exerting undue influence in the matter of a race track in Saint-Luc.

In 1986, the minister of regional industrial expansion, Mr. Stevens, resigned because he was being investigated in relation to conflict of interest allegations, which is much more serious.

In 2002, the solicitor general of Canada, currently Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, resigned because he was being investigated in relation to conflict of interest allegations.

In 2005, the present member for Humber River—Black Creek resigned in the midst of allegations of improprieties.

Last, in 2010, minister of state Helena Guergis resigned because she was being investigated regarding allegations relating to her conduct.

As we can see, for various reasons, trivial or otherwise, ministers have followed a very important convention in our country, a constitutional convention that requires a man or woman who holds office as a minister of Canada to resign when the members of the House question their confidence in him or her. Here, it is not only us; it is the entire Canadian Forces that are questioning their confidence in the minister. He should simply resign.

●(1610)

When we learn the truth about all of the issues that concern us, and if he did not in fact lie to Canadians, he will be able to return.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been around the block a few times this afternoon on the minister's role. I think it's fair to say that he played a significant role, that his role was instrumental. Now we are debating on how he characterized his role, and in fact, he has apologized for that on numerous occasions.

Since we are talking about that, though, a number of minutes ago, I watched a leadership video by the member for Durham where he said that he served in the air force where he "flew Sea King helicopters on operations at home and abroad". I am not one to take a shot at the member's role in the military, which is very honourable, but that is absolutely what he did not do. The video did not say that he flew in Sea King helicopters; it said he flew Sea King helicopters. There is a massive difference.

Having said that, will the members opposite be asking for his apology and asking him to withdraw from the leadership race?

●(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the member is simply trying to create a diversion. In my speech and during this opposition day, what is important is talking about a minister. Like all his predecessors, the minister should follow the constitutional convention of ministerial responsibility, and, most importantly, honour it. Right at the outset, in December 2015, the Prime Minister told the House that he was not like Mr. Harper and he had a cabinet government. A cabinet government takes responsibility, and when a minister is in the wrong, he resigns.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

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I would first like to say that I approach this question not as a member of the military, since I have never been part of the armed forces. This weekend, again, I had the chance to participate in the ceremony in Trois-Rivières to commemorate the Battle of the Atlantic. I am always astounded to see how the military, regardless of the force, seems to have respect for two things: the code of honour and the chain of command.

I am not a conspiracy theory enthusiast, but since our minister of defence is a soldier himself, I imagine that he has the same respect for the two things I just mentioned.

I wonder about something: could it be that it is actually the Prime Minister who refused his resignation, presumably to preserve his government's image?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting theory. I hope it doesn't, but if it holds true, the minister must be having a difficult time. That being said, there is no law requiring that he agree to his Prime Minister's request that he not step down.

On the other hand, he ought to respect and apply a constitutional convention endorsed for centuries in our British parliamentary system and resign when faced with a loss of confidence brought on by his actions.

Personally, I detest conspiracy theories. That said, I hope that this is not the case here.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the system of responsible government, which we fought for and obtained in 1848, obviously concerns the whole of government. When we speak of responsibility, it is in the context of a government stepping down. However, in our case, we have a minister who retains the confidence of his Prime Minister, despite what some would have us believe. The Prime Minister has said very clearly that he supports the minister.

Does my colleague not think that we should judge the minister on his policy and on his review of the national defence policy, which will provide the members of the armed forces the resources they need to guarantee the sovereignty of the country, the defence of North America and peace in the world?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, in 1848, the issue was responsible government. I am talking about ministerial responsibility, which is a convention pertaining to a minister who is at fault. This has absolutely nothing to do with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister can keep placing his trust in him, that goes without saying. However, the minister must realize, on his own, as a man or woman of honesty and dignity, that no one is listening to him anymore.

The defence report that has just been released paints the picture of a terrible Conservative government, even though that was not the case at all. The Canada First defence strategy meant \$20 billion more for National Defence. Who is going to believe that report now, dear colleagues? No one. That is the reality. That is why the minister has to resign. He is compromising the work of all of his colleagues, mainly that of the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister has not shown him the door in a few weeks' time, the situation will fester and the government will begin to rot from within.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Longueuil—Charles-LeMoynes.

I am happy to take part in today's debate to highlight the contributions of a remarkable man, the Minister of National Defence. I have had the pleasure to know the minister for a year and a half, and the honour to work more closely with him since my appointment as parliamentary secretary.

For many months now, we have been working to make Canada better. We have promised to bring real change, to be here for Canadians, to listen to them and respond to their wishes.

Canadians have given us a clear mandate, namely to build a Canada that is prosperous and open to the world, a Canada that reflects our values. Canadians expect us to keep our commitments, and we are doing so. Today, more than ever, the middle class is becoming stronger and more people are able to join its ranks.

After a difficult decade when people had stopped believing, our government has been able to re-establish contact with Canadians. The consultations we have held let us know that we are on the right track. We are listening, and the messages we are receiving clearly demonstrate how important it is for Canadians to have an open and transparent government.

In establishing this communication, we are creating a bond of mutual trust. To maintain that bond, we will not hide behind closed doors, and if we make mistakes, we must acknowledge them right away.

Canadians are not expecting us to be perfect, but they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

In exercising our duties, we must act in accordance with the values that characterize us. Inclusion, honesty, professionalism, and conscientious work are just a few of the values we must place at the service of our fellow citizens.

Having spent the past few months working with the Minister of National Defence, I have been a privileged witness to his integrity and the determination with which he discharges his mandate.

The primary responsibility of the minister, and of our government, is to oversee the interests of our troops and make sure they are prepared and provided with the equipment they need to protect the sovereignty of Canada, defend North America, provide disaster relief, conduct search and rescue missions, support the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, and contribute to the security of our allies.

We are working to discharge that mandate with the greatest respect for our men and women in uniform. We must ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces have the support, the training, and the equipment they need to successfully complete the various missions they are assigned.

Over the last year and a half, our minister has sought to achieve this very objective. It is what he strives for every day.

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One of the key elements of his mandate is to provide our country with a new defence policy. Over the past year, with the assistance of all the members in the House, we have undertaken the broadest public consultation in 20 years. Canadians from coast to coast to coast have been able to express their views and tell us their concerns regarding this new policy.

We have conducted an in-depth analysis to be sure we have a model that meets the needs of our military. Today, it is the responsibility of the minister and the government to ensure that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces have all of the equipment necessary to successfully carry out their missions, and all the support they need for their well-being.

The Minister of National Defence has been given a broad mandate that he is carrying out. He will soon be able to disclose this new defence policy, which will guarantee the sustainability of resources by ensuring adequate funding and costs that are rigorously established for the next 20 years.

In that policy, the government commits to providing a level of investment that will put the Canadian Armed Forces in a stable position in terms of finances, capital, and human resources, so that we will have a force that is modern, more flexible, and better equipped.

The men and women of our armed forces do an exceptional job of performing their duties, but they cannot carry out their missions indefinitely without adequate support. We are currently working to fill the gaps that have resulted from our predecessors' mismanagement. Numerous efforts have already been made by this government to achieve those objectives.

In Québec, in particular, we can see the benefits of this intention. Recently, I was able to announce, on behalf of the Minister of National Defence, the start of work on the construction of two new multi-purpose buildings in Bagotville. A company in Chicoutimi has been awarded a \$47-million contract to carry out that work.

● (1620)

The overall investment will be \$95 million, and the objective is to improve the 3 Wing infrastructure. This project will improve 3 Wing's capacity to control and defend North American air space when duty calls. These facilities will provide us with the solution to the problem of the infrastructure shortage.

We will also ensure that all soldiers have the tools and resources they need to do their work to the best of their ability. By modernizing and replacing outdated military infrastructure, we are putting the Canadian Armed Forces in a better position to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Times are changing and the Canadian Armed Forces need to have not only modern equipment, but also training that is appropriate for today's reality. It is of the utmost importance that Canada focus on maximizing human resource development.

To achieve this, continuous training and education are inexhaustible sources that enable the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces to develop superior skills sets. It is clear that the quality of this training enables Canadian military personnel to fulfill their

operational role and helps to place our armed forces among the most educated and skilled in the world.

In announcing the upcoming return of university studies at Royal Military College Saint-Jean with interest and conviction as he did, the minister expressed the importance of maintaining a representative francophone presence in the Canadian Armed Forces, and in particular in the defence staff, thereby contributing to maintaining our identity in Canada.

The time has come to restore the college to its former glory so that it can actively participate in maintaining our troops' expertise and supporting the Canadian government in redefining its military mission.

Canada's return to its fundamental principles ties in very well with the academic orientation that the Royal Military College Saint-Jean aims to take. The humanities and social sciences programs will foster the training of leaders who have the skills required to work in conflict resolution.

The college has proven its value on numerous occasions by providing a francophone military learning environment and advancing bilingualism and linguistic diversity in the Canadian Armed Forces. The resumption of university education will help promote improved recruitment of francophones, allophones and anglophones from Quebec and all across Canada for the Royal Military College Saint-Jean.

We have to offer our soldiers all the support, training and equipment they need to successfully carry out their various missions. The Canadian armed forces must be versatile and ready to respond in various types of terrain, as they are demonstrating at this very moment.

In fact, in the wake of these historic floods, nearly 1,200 troops were sent yesterday to the following four assembly areas: Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Shawinigan, Laval and Gatineau. They will be posted to offer support and respond to needs that have been identified in collaboration with our civilian partners.

The Canadian Armed Forces are always prepared to lend assistance to civil authorities during an emergency in Canada, including natural disasters, at all times and in all places. These CAF operations are designated Operation Lentus. We ask the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces to take on some extremely difficult tasks, and it is our duty to support them and our obligation to equip them.

To guarantee the safety of Canadians and be prepared to act when needed, the government has to strike a balance between its different priorities. In a global context of constant change, we will pursue our military investments to ensure that all our resources are up to date and that our personnel and their families are appropriately supported.

The Minister of National Defence is a former reservist who is in regular contact with our men and women in uniform. He understands the military reality very well, and will always hold in high esteem the service of Canadian Armed Forces members, those currently serving as well as the ones with whom he served on his missions, and those who served under other commanders or at other times.

Government Orders

The minister's unconditional commitment to the execution of his mandate shows the great respect he has for the members of the Canadian forces. In accepting his duties, the minister has undertaken to be honest, to be transparent and to be accountable to Canadians. He is a member of a government that holds to the most rigorous ethical standards. Every time he reports to work, he does so at the service of Canada and with a view to improving our country and the lives of all Canadian citizens, both military and civilian.

• (1625)

Last week, the Prime Minister gave his support to the Minister of National Defence, and caucus did as well. Today, in the House, I assure my colleague of my complete collaboration. I will continue to serve the members of the Canadian Armed Forces alongside him with all of the loyalty that he himself has shown in the exercise of his duties.

• (1630)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague the parliamentary secretary for his most interesting speech.

[*English*]

My having been a parliamentary secretary to a minister, I realize that the parliamentary secretary has an intimate relationship with the minister, so I think he might be in a good position to answer this question.

For weeks we have been asking the minister to explain what happened. Members on both sides of the House have expressed their respect and gratitude for the wonderful service that the minister has given to his country as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, but for some reason, in the last 18 months, his work performance has been totally opposite to what his work performance was as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. We have a man who promoted integrity and honesty as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, but as a minister, maybe not so much.

Maybe the parliamentary secretary, who probably knows the minister better than all other colleagues in the House, could explain why the minister has changed so dramatically and is not the man of integrity that he was as a member of the forces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his interesting question. I also thank him for recognizing the work that the minister has done through all of the last year and a half to introduce a new defence policy by means of an emeritus consultation with experts and MPs.

In the riding of Saint-Jean alone, over 150 persons demonstrated their interest and made some very interesting proposals to us. If only because of the process he developed, I believe the minister enjoys the confidence of all military personnel.

Last week, at the Battle of the Atlantic gala, not only was it my impression that the minister showed very great credibility, but I noticed above all that he had great hope for the new policy and the stable new investments to be made in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his presentation.

I know that comparisons are not always easy, but for a civilian like myself, this is difficult to understand. Members will no doubt recall the incident that was called the fake soldier. In 2014, on Remembrance Day, a civilian wore the uniform and even gave interviews on television. This did not seem to me a crime of *lèse-majesté*, but later on we learned that it was, since this type of offence appears in section 419 of the Criminal Code.

If the actions of a civilian merit such punishment, how can we be satisfied with partial excuses for the behaviour of a minister attempting to embellish his military exploits?

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Trois-Rivières for his question.

I think we are talking about two very different incidents. In the case mentioned by the member, the act was intentional. In the minister's case, there was no intent: the first thing he did was to apologize and state that he did not want to diminish the role of his superiors and his brothers in arms. He recognized all of the work done by the men and women who took part in that mission in Afghanistan. I think we are talking about two totally different things.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, Indigenous Affairs; and the hon. member for Windsor West, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to highlight the 1,650 members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are currently deployed to help with the flood efforts in the Trois-Rivières to Gatineau corridor, and in New Brunswick and B.C.

Earlier today our Minister of National Defence provided the House with information regarding the defence policy review. It was a frank conversation, a situational analysis, so to speak, about the current state of affairs in the Canadian Armed Forces. He had the courage to come forward and talk about this reality, in fact, and also mentioned that it was not the previous government that brought those situations to bear but consecutive governments. We are not trying to be partisan in this regard. We know there are significant issues.

We have talked a bit about the material resources that are required. We have heard a lot about the procurement problems in the Canadian Armed Forces. More importantly, we have heard about the importance of investing in our people, those brave men and women who are wearing the uniform, or who have worn the uniform, and the families that support them.

Government Orders

While I look forward to the results of the defence policy review being made public, I would like to highlight some of the efforts that have been made by both the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of National Defence in terms of the support provided to Canadian Armed Forces members transitioning to civilian life and our veterans who have served our country so valiantly.

[*Translation*]

Since 2015, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Veterans Affairs have been working closely together to ensure that the transition from military life to civilian life goes as smoothly as possible for members of the Canadian Armed Forces released from military service.

[*English*]

Each year an average of about 9,000 Canadian Armed Forces members release from the regular and reserve forces. They each have their own unique story and their own distinctive needs. Some will need help with their transition to civilian life.

If there is one thing all Canadians can agree on, it is our debt of gratitude toward our Canadian Armed Forces members and our veterans. After their selfless contributions, the government owes them the means to get back on their feet and on with their lives. We are committed to doing just that, to help veterans and their families successfully transition to civilian life and to move on to the next chapter.

In budget 2016 we focused on the financial security of veterans and their families. We reopened nine offices closed by the former government and opened a new one. Veterans Affairs Canada hired almost 400 new front-line staff, which includes new case managers. These historic actions taken in budget 2016 committed approximately \$5.6 billion in additional financial benefits for our veterans and their families.

[*Translation*]

Budget 2017 builds on these initiatives to create a broader and more comprehensive approach to ensuring the well-being of veterans by focusing on the family.

When I meet with veterans, regardless of whether they served for one year or 10, they want to talk about it because they firmly believe that a person who served in the armed forces is a soldier for life. We know how hard it can sometimes be for veterans to deal with the loss of the military family culture. We want them to continue to be a part of that family.

That is why we are expanding access to the military family services program and opening the doors of the 32 military family resource centres to ill and injured veterans and their families.

We are also improving and enhancing the family caregiver relief benefit by directly providing caregivers with a tax-free monthly payment of \$1,000. The time limit within which spouses and survivors must apply for rehabilitation services and vocational assistance will also be eliminated so that they can return to the workforce.

That means that the spouses, partners, and caregivers who help our ill or injured veterans day after day will get more support and

more recognition from the government for their invaluable contributions.

We are also investing nearly \$14 million over four years in a new veteran and family well-being fund that will be used for research on issues and new initiatives to improve the support provided to veterans and their families.

• (1640)

[*English*]

We are also doing more to help veterans transition to their post-military life. The new veterans education and training benefit covers up to \$80,000 in tuition and other costs for members. Some of this benefit can be used toward professional development. This benefit will ensure more released military members can find a new sense of purpose and put their skills to use.

We are also redesigning the career transition services we offer so that more people can use them, including survivors, spouses, and partners. They will have access to job search assistance and coaching from coaches who understand military culture.

[*Translation*]

Early engagement is key to a successful transition from military to civilian life. My colleagues in the Canadian Armed Forces have likely talked about the improved transition services, a joint initiative of Veterans Affairs and the Canadian Armed Forces, the aim of which is to reach out sooner to members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are leaving the service and their families. This initiative has already been rolled out in 24 integrated personnel support centres.

Mental health is a key component of the care and support offered to our veterans. This issue often gets a lot of media attention and is one of our top priorities.

That is why we are committed to ensuring that our veterans, as well as RCMP members and their families, get the mental health support they need, when they need it. That is also why, in budget 2017, we followed through on our commitment to establish a centre of excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions.

We are investing \$17.5 million over five years in this centre, which will provide research, education, and liaison services for veterans and their families, and will contribute to the development of emerging best practices.

[*English*]

Additionally, we commit to finalizing the details of a monthly pension for life option for ill and injured veterans in 2017, further adding to their financial security.

[*Translation*]

The last thing I want to talk about today is our review of service delivery. We recently announced that the review is complete. We now have a plan that will allow us to provide services more quickly and with greater flexibility to adapt better to veterans' needs.

Government Orders

We understand and know that the current system needs to be changed in order to create a process that is easy to access, simple to navigate, and focused on the veteran. An overhaul is needed. It is not just a matter of making a change to a policy to plug another hole in the system. It is time to rebuild.

[*English*]

This government has made it our mission to improve the well-being of veterans and their families. That means having a purpose, financial security, shelter, medical support, family and community support, and a sense of identity. We are committed to helping them achieve that. When it comes to our brave men and women in uniform and those who have served, we need to take politics out of it. The DPR, defence policy review, has shown that the needs in the Canadian Armed Forces are great. This House currently has former members of the Canadian Armed Forces sitting as well as family members of those who have served or those who are currently serving.

To err is human, and we have all done so. It is time to accept the minister's apology and work together to address the issues identified in the defence policy review. Anything further is playing politics on the backs of those we claim to support, our brave men and women in uniform.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite incredible. I do not know how many members will not answer the question.

One of the things the Liberals, unfortunately, never talked about is what the issue was. Everybody has talked about discrediting the minister in his former positions. What really we are talking about is the minister's fabricating a response to give himself credit for something that he did not do but someone else did, so that he can discredit other people below him. It was not a mistake.

We have heard time and again that he made a mistake and he apologized. I am sorry but he did not make a mistake. He fabricated a response and he kept repeating it. I would like the member to tell me why the minister continues to fabricate that response and why he should stay.

• (1645)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, as the minister has said on numerous occasions, as have my colleagues, the minister acknowledged his mistake. He apologized for this mistake. He has apologized to this House and to the Canadian public. He has retracted his statement. In no way did he intend to diminish the hard work of the men and women in uniform. Therefore, I accept his apology. He has the full support of the Prime Minister, as he does this caucus. I would urge this House to accept his apology and work together so that we can get done what we need to get done for our brave men and women.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way spoke about helping veterans. Therefore, I have to ask why the current government has not kept its promise to reinstate a lifetime pension for injured veterans and why it is fighting in court veterans who are trying to seek access to those benefits.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, as indicated in the minister's mandate letter and as indicated in budget 2017, we are committed to bringing forward a pension-for-life option for our

brave men and women. The details of that will be made available before the end of this year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her compassionate speech. Unfortunately, that is not the topic being debated today.

Members of the government, the team across the way, keep attacking the former government by saying that it did nothing for the Canadian Forces for 10 years. I would remind my colleagues about the C-17 Globemasters, the C-130 Hercules and the Cyclone helicopters that are being built, and the LAV 6 given to infantry troops. Is that nothing? I could go on. We are being accused of doing nothing, but we contributed arms. This government is currently cutting \$12 billion from the procurement budget.

Let us come back to the issue of the minister. The purpose of this day is to talk about the problems with the Minister of National Defence. Earlier, my colleague talked about being honest. When has the minister been honest through all he is accused of having done in the past year and a half? When the CF-18s were being withdrawn, he said that the Iraqis said nothing about it, but that is not true. What is honest about making up the capability gap? What is so honest about calling himself the architect of Operation Medusa? Why did he do that?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his service. It was truly a pleasure working with him on the Standing Committee on National Defence before I was appointed parliamentary secretary.

The member said that we keep attacking the previous government. I did no such thing in any parts of my speech. In fact, I even said that several governments did not invest in the Canadian Armed Forces. I did not attack anyone as that is not my way.

With respect to the \$12 billion in cuts, they never happened. We reallocated \$8.48 billion to a procurement fund. That does not mean that we made cuts.

[*English*]

What it means is that we have parked that money for when the assets are available. The money has not been cut. I urge my colleague across the way to wait for the defence policy review to become public, and then we can have a conversation.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

BILL C-44—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 Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the consideration of certain amendments to Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act, and the Income Tax Act.

Government Orders

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.

* * *

● (1650)

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2017, NO. 1

BILL C-44—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 Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-44, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2017, and other measures. Not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of the second reading stage of the said bill.

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

OPPOSITION MOTION—MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

It is a disappointment to rise in the House on this debate. It is disappointing that we have a Minister of National Defence who has been less than straightforward with the truth, a minister who fabricated something of significance. That fabrication was the role the minister played in one of the largest military operations in Canadian history. As a result of that fabrication, the Minister of National Defence has dishonoured the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

What is all the more disappointing is that the minister who did this is someone who has served with distinction. He has a distinguished service record. The minister served his community of Vancouver as a member of the Vancouver police department. He served Canada as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, where he served overseas on four occasions, including three times in Afghanistan.

The service of the Minister of National Defence is not in question by any member of the House. Indeed, the minister has every right to be proud of his record of service as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces.

However, the issue today is not about the minister's past service to the country. It is about his recent actions as a Liberal politician. In particular, the issue before us is the issue that arose when the minister spoke in New Delhi, where he falsely claimed that he was

the architect of Operation Medusa. It is true that the minister played a role in Operation Medusa, and indeed, several members of the Canadian Armed Forces in senior ranks have credited the minister for the leadership he provided and his service in Operation Medusa. However, the minister was not the architect of Operation Medusa.

What is worse is that this is not the first time the minister has misrepresented his role in Operation Medusa. Indeed, during the 2015 campaign, when the minister was then a candidate, he similarly claimed that he was the architect of Operation Medusa. When the minister was called on it at that time, instead of owning up to the fact that he had misrepresented the facts, instead of apologizing, he tried to claim that really, all he was doing was quoting something General Vance had coined. In other words, General Vance had called the minister the architect of Operation Medusa. The only problem with the minister's statement was that General Vance did not take command in Afghanistan until 2009, three years after Operation Medusa ceased.

The Minister of National Defence says that what he said was a mistake. It was not a mistake. It was a fabrication, and it was a fabrication the minister made not once but on at least two occasions. The words of the minister are not ambiguous. They are not at issue in terms of what he really said. Indeed, the minister's words were clear and unambiguous.

● (1655)

The minister said that he was the architect of Operation Medusa, full stop. Not only that, the minister actually physically inserted those words into the speech, according to his own spokesman. What we are talking about here is something that was planned, something that was deliberate.

Why would the minister misrepresent his record of service in Afghanistan? Clearly it was to impress a foreign audience in New Delhi. The minister thought he could get away with it, but he did not get away with it. He now sort of provides a half-apology. I do not know if I have ever actually heard a complete, full apology from the minister. I say that this is not good enough. It is not good enough for the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. Men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, every day, are expected to adhere to the highest standards of excellence. They should expect no less from the Minister of National Defence who is charged with leading them.

The seriousness of what the Minister of National Defence did cannot be minimized. We are talking about one of the largest military operations in Canadian history, which the minister claimed he was the architect of. We are talking about the second-largest NATO operation since the Korean War. It was an operation that involved the service and sacrifice of hundreds of Canadian soldiers, service and sacrifice the minister has taken credit for. There is a term for what the Minister of National Defence did, and that term is "stolen valour".

The fundamental values of the Canadian Armed Forces include duty, integrity, loyalty, and courage. The actions of the minister are the antithesis of those fundamental values of the Canadian Armed Forces. Moreover, they are in contravention of the Canadian Armed Forces' code of values and ethics. They would be subject to sanction, in fact, under section 129 of the Code of Service Discipline.

Government Orders

The actions of the minister have outraged many men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

William Sinclair, a 37-year veteran of the Canadian Armed Force, wrote on Facebook, “Minister, as a veteran of 37 years of military service, what the Minister of National Defence has done to the military and to Canadians alike is downright wrong. He has lost all respect, I think, of all veterans of Afghanistan and of all the military as a whole. He should be made to resign his cabinet post as minister. He is a disgrace to the Canadian military.”

William Sinclair, a 37-year veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, is just one of many.

Notwithstanding his record of service, his distinguished record of service, which no one calls into question, the Minister of National Defence, through his own actions, through his own choices, and through his own hubris, brought disgrace upon himself. As a result, he has dishonoured the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. As a result, there is only one thing left for the minister to do to restore his own credibility and to demonstrate respect for the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, and that is to resign immediately as Minister of National Defence.

● (1700)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that several people are folding in different aspects of this issue. I hold in very high regard the efforts of the Minister of National Defence in terms of his role as a soldier and as a person who dedicated himself and his bravery to a higher sense of purpose in his military role.

That said, I also understand, as my hon. colleague explained, that there is also the higher sense of purpose to being a member of Parliament here in this House, knowing that we have a Prime Minister who issued mandate letters to all of the ministers that are very much in the spirit and crux of what my hon. colleague described in his speech. I wonder if there is now a concern with regard to there now being several versions of what has happened and that maybe this idea of mere fabrication means that we should be looking again at the conflict of interest issue in terms of quashing an inquiry into Afghan detainees.

I wonder if my hon. colleague can comment on how the evolution of this issue has maybe allowed him to revisit and reconsider the consequences of this kind of fabrication on an actual conflict of interest.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Afghan issue has been examined at considerable length. I would recognize that the member for Windsor—Tecumseh raises an interesting point that ties in to the various statements the minister has made about his role in Operation Medusa. There was the statement that he was the architect. Then there was the statement that he was not the architect, but played a significant role. Then there is what the Minister of National Defence submitted to the Ethics Commissioner, which was that he was just there in an advisory capacity for cultural purposes and the training of police.

It highlights once again that on the question of Operation Medusa, the minister has been less than forthcoming. It calls into question the minister's judgment and his ability to continue on as minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote a letter of recommendation from General Fraser concerning the Minister of National Defence:

[*English*]

I rate him as one of the best intelligence officers I have ever worked with—fearless, smart, and personable, and I would not hesitate to have him on my staff at any time in the future. I have advised my chain of command that the Canadian Forces must capture his skillset, and seek his advice on how to change our entire tactical intelligence training and architecture to best meet the needs of future deployed units fighting in extremely complex human battlespace.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

When will the opposition stop playing petty politics with this file? Dear colleagues, you are going nowhere and are only serving to sow confusion among Canadians.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind members to address their comments to the Chair.

The member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the only hon. member who is sowing confusion is the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, because no one questioned the service of the Minister of National Defence, his bravery, courage, and his service to Canada as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I guess the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin must not have heard half of my speech, in which I went into some length about the minister's service.

That is not the issue. The issue is that the minister misrepresented something very significant about his service. As a result, he has brought disgrace upon himself and dishonoured the men and women whom he is charged with leading.

I remind the hon. member that this is not a minor matter. It is a serious matter, and the minister needs to take responsibility by resigning.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion we are considering today is not something that we take lightly, and believe me when I say that I take no joy in adding my voice to the voices of my colleagues in the Conservative Party and the NDP in asking for the Minister of National Defence to resign.

Despite the fact that we serve in different political parties, it is not hard to respect the courage and commitment to Canada shown by the defence minister. For 28 years, he served with the Canadian Armed Forces. His service record speaks for itself, and the honours he has received speak to the high esteem his colleagues and superiors held him in. This is why I honour his courage, his dedication, and his valour on the battlefield.

However, we are not here to debate the defence minister's military service. We are here instead to debate his ability to lead the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. The only question that is relevant is whether or not the minister has the confidence of those whose lives depend on the policy choices that he makes. In this respect, the answer is clearly no.

Government Orders

The greatest anger, outrage, and betrayal has come from those brave men and women who served in Afghanistan. It goes without saying that anyone who served in Afghanistan put their lives on the line for Canada. Whether they were in the green zone in Kabul or forward operating bases in Kandahar, there was an imminent threat that they could be killed by the Taliban. The valour and courage with which Canadians served in Afghanistan brought honour and distinction to Canada, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. They are our heroes.

Every society from the dawn of civilization has celebrated military acts of courage, immortalizing the heroes who performed such deeds, whether it was individual acts of heroism on the battlefield or ingenious innovations for strategy or technique. That is why in military culture, the idea of stolen valour is such a taboo.

When our men and women in uniform perform heroic acts of service, they deserve full credit for their deeds. Our entire military honour system is based on recognizing individuals for actions that go above and beyond the call of duty. The defence minister has rightly been recognized, through this system, for the work he did. However, when people take credit for the work of others in order to make themselves appear more important, they are attempting to erase the acts of valour that their brothers and sisters in arms undertook.

This is why this deception, as acknowledged by the minister, matters. By claiming to be the architect of Operation Medusa, the defence minister sought to receive full credit for the work of an entire team of senior military planners. As one of the key intelligence officers in the region, he rightly has been recognized for providing invaluable intelligence that assisted those planning the operation. To take credit for being the master planner steals credit from officers much more senior than himself, including officers from other nations. This stolen valour is not taken just from Canadian troops, it is also taken from our British and Australian allies, which reflects poorly on Canada as a whole.

The Minister of National Defence has yet to explain why he has on multiple occasions made this false claim. The two highest-profile examples took place first in the 2015 election campaign, and then in a recent speech in India. In both of these instances, the minister was embellishing to improve people's impressions of himself. The first time was in the election when he was speaking with local media, in order to make himself appear more important to those people who might vote for him. The second instance was when he was speaking to an audience in New Delhi, representing Canada abroad. He clearly was more interested in his ego and reputation than the facts. He knew it was untrue, and now he has had to apologize multiple times for both the deception and the damage it has done. This is, unfortunately, a growing pattern of deception and loose treatment of facts by the minister.

● (1710)

The minister's word in the House of Commons has been contradicted by his officials in multiple instances. The minister told this House that our allies in the Middle East were not concerned when the Liberals pulled our CF-18s from the fight against ISIS. Briefing notes that have come to light since showed that our allies begged Canada to stay in the fight. The minister told this House that the previous government had not provided tax breaks to our armed

forces members in Kuwait who were part of the battle against ISIS. This was also contradicted by an Order Paper question that the minister himself signed. The minister has repeatedly argued that Canada faces a capabilities gap when it comes to replacing the CF-18s. This is also contradicted by public testimony of our air force officers in charge of our CF-18 squadrons. The only conclusion that makes sense is that the minister has given up accuracy and truthfulness in exchange for political expediency.

It is no secret that the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party do not respect our military. The Liberal approach to our armed forces has consistently demonstrated that the Liberals believe their political strategists know best, even when they are recklessly putting our men and women in harm's way. This must be an incredibly uncomfortable position for the Minister of National Defence to be in. His entire career was based on serving his brothers and sisters in arms. Now he is the one who has to tell them, with a straight face, that what the current Liberal government is doing is in their best interest. Therefore, it is no wonder that he has decided to play fast and loose with the facts, because the facts do not support the Liberals' approach.

In conclusion, the Minister of National Defence has lost the confidence of the men and women he is accountable for. They do not trust his ability to fight for them at the cabinet table. Their trust in him as an honourable soldier has been shaken. Given the uncertain global climate we find ourselves in, we need a defence minister in whom Canadians have confidence. The minister's loose treatment of the facts casts grave doubts on his ability to manage this important department.

Mr. Speaker, do not take my word for that. Take the words of a retired colonel, Ian Barnes. He said the following:

[The defence minister's] claim that during his tour in Afghanistan in 2006 he was the architect of Operation Medusa is preposterous. [...]

[The minister] has shown by his actions that he is an embarrassment to Canada and is not suitable to hold the position of Minister of National Defence. He should be removed from office.

These are the words of a retired colonel, and we have heard many other words from veterans and retired members of our military service. For these reasons, this House has lost confidence in the minister's ability to do his job. The only honourable course of action is for the minister to resign. We, on this side of the House, call on him to do the honourable thing.

● (1715)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder how many of the people who are quoted from the opposition benches were in the room when plans were being made. How can they say with such assurance that things did not happen or did happen when they probably were not there?

Government Orders

I would also want the member to comment on the fact that there is a site in Canada called Stolen Valour, where veterans stick up for the issue of people claiming things that are not true and discrediting the military in doing so. Perhaps the member can explain why there are zero references to this incident on this site that is set up by veterans to deal with incidents of stolen valour.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak to intents or why folks have not gone on that specific site, but we have been quoting veterans throughout this debate. I can quote another one, if the member would like. Robert Wortman, a 20-year veteran of the Canadian forces said the following:

[The Minister of National Defence] has no credibility left and so he should resign. I served in the military for 20 years and if someone continued to [mislead] me, trying to take credit for something someone else did, he should not be in a position of trust.

How can anyone in the military trust the minister now?

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been in contact with an Afghan vet from my riding. He has definitely disclosed his disfavour with the comments made by the minister of defence. He said that if he had a commanding officer that had operated similarly when he was in the military, the expectation would have been that he or she would resign because of the lack of respect that commander would have.

I wonder if the member could tell us about a conversation she has had with one of her constituents.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I have spent some time back home in my riding and this has been brought to my attention. One of the terms I have heard recently in regard to this conversation is “ethical fading”. It refers to an erosion of the ethical standards of a business or organization in which members of that business or organization become used to engaging in or condoning such behaviour.

I would like to remind my colleague and those participating in the debate that there is a national defence code of ethics. My hon. colleague quoted it earlier. Being a person of integrity calls for honesty and the avoidance of deception. It requires the pursuit of truth regardless of personal consequences. We have to pay attention to that.

When we have retired members of our Canadian Armed Forces who see the kind of ethical fading we see today, it creates great angst for them, and it is why we are hearing from them in the way we are.

• (1720)

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to take part in this debate initiated by the official opposition, which is putting into question the ability of the Minister of National Defence to carry out his responsibility.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of National Defence for his years of dedicated service to our country: over 10 years as a police officer, over 25 years in the Canadian Reserves, and four deployments to Afghanistan and Bosnia. In our minister, we have a decorated war hero, and this is very uncommon. I am proud to have him as my minister.

The official opposition has been trying very hard recently to downgrade and diminish the image and the reputation of the minister by making all kinds of insinuations.

I have quite a different image of the Minister of National Defence. I remember how honoured he was in November 2015 to be appointed the Minister of National Defence. I remember how privileged and humbled he was to have the opportunity to serve as Canada's Minister of National Defence. I remember a message he sent to me and all parliamentarians three weeks after his appointment, on November 27, 2015, to be exact, in which he advocated how, as a government, we were committed to governing for all Canadians and bringing Canadians together, including all parliamentarians.

He highlighted the Prime Minister and the government's sincere commitment to renew openness and collaboration in the pursuit of the priorities of our country. He appealed to the fact that each of us, as elected officials, had been selected by our respective constituents to act as their voice and their advocates in Ottawa and acknowledged that each of us brought value and informed perspectives to the table.

The final part of this email to all of us is one of the most relevant and most valuable elements of the character of the minister. It states, “With that in mind, I want to personally convey to you that my office is open to all Parliamentary colleagues who want to contribute to our work on defence. I can assure you that the Government is committed to ensuring that the Canadian Armed Forces continues to stand amongst the best military forces in the world, and remains well-positioned to continue serving this great country. We look forward to working in partnership with you in that endeavour. Together, we will chart the way forward for our men and women in uniform.”

Canadians expect openness and accessibility. We know that these values are central to a free and civil society. They are among the pillars of democracies.

At the very beginning of his mandate, this is what the Minister of National Defence was offering to the members of the House and to the members of the Senate: He is a minister who over the last 18 months has been working tirelessly, day after day, to put together all the necessary elements to ensure the Canadian Armed Forces continues to stand among the best military forces in the world and remains well-positioned, well-equipped, and ready to serve our country.

There are few responsibilities greater than the safety and security of our country. Every day, the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces undertake vital, challenging, and often dangerous work to keep our country and world safe.

At the beginning of this month, members of our navy return to Halifax after two months in West Africa, helping to strengthen maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. In February, the Canadian Armed Forces provided assistance to the people of the Acadian Peninsula in northern New Brunswick after that region was hit by a massive ice storm. Recently, the Canadian Rangers in northern Ontario helped evacuate the Kashechewan First Nation as it faced potential flooding. Now the forces have a mission under way to assist the residents of Quebec who are facing the same crisis.

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CAF members continue to demonstrate globally recognized leadership skills by helping train security forces in Iraq and Ukraine.

• (1725)

Overseas and close to home, CAF members achieve much more than what can be described in words alone. It is vital that we communicate their work to Canadians. The Department of National Defence reports on that work directly to the public by sharing the data it can via the open Canada initiative, access to information releases, and progress reports on important initiatives such as Operation Honour.

However, as elected officials, we have an additional responsibility to our constituents to obtain information on their behalf about our armed forces. As Canadians, we owe it to our service members to understand and promote the work they do to make this world a better place in defending our country.

That is why the Minister of National Defence has reintroduced key access opportunities for parliamentarians, opportunities that had been cancelled by the previous government, so that we, as the representatives of citizens, can see first-hand how our men and women work to keep Canada safe and secure, and to see how their government is investing in its military.

Until last year, if a member of Parliament wanted to visit a military facility in his or her riding, he or she needed to get the approval of the Minister of National Defence. In other words, in order for a representative of the Canadian people to tour facilities and understand the perspective of Canadian Armed Forces members in his or her own riding, he or she had to appeal not to the leaders of those facilities, those who would know the facilities best, but to a cabinet minister in Ottawa. That is not open. That is not accessible. That is not right.

Therefore, in February 2016, at the direction of the minister, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces changed access regulations to make it easier for parliamentarians to visit military facilities. This change empowers base commanders and commanding officers of Canadian Forces support units to approve and accept requests for visits from members of Parliament and senators who represent them.

This change respects the knowledge of base commanders and commanding officers of their own facilities. They know better than anyone how to balance security considerations with the obligation to share their work with elected representatives. We have ensured they are the ones making decisions that serve both.

This increased access benefits parliamentarians from coast to coast to coast who represent areas with military facilities. There are many other places in Canada, however, where the physical presence of the Canadian Armed Forces is not as directly felt.

The Minister of National Defence believes that it is vital for all parliamentarians, not just those fortunate enough to have CAF facilities in their ridings, to interact with members of the Canadian Armed Forces. This approach involves more than visiting them where they work at facilities. It also means visiting them during exercises across Canada.

That is why, with strong support from the minister, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces reinstated the Canadian Armed Forces parliamentary program this year after it was revoked six years ago. To date, 32 members of Parliament and five Senators of all political stripes have participated in events that give them the chance to live and work with CAF members.

In the House today, there are colleagues who have patrolled the Pacific on the HMCS *Vancouver* and visited CFB Esquimalt. There are colleagues who have sailed from Halifax to St. John's aboard the HMCS *Ville de Quebec* no later than last week. There are colleagues who will work alongside thousands of army and air force members from Canada and abroad in Alberta later this spring.

This is openness and accessibility, and it is the minister that made sure it happened. He believes that the notion of open and free government is hollow if we do not share our work. He is so proud of the Canadian Armed Forces and of the work of those who sacrifice so much to protect our openness and freedom for Canadians.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I may have some questions for her, but I would first like to remind her why we are here. We are not here to talk about the member's military history or the kind of army major he used to be. We are here to talk about his role as a politician and about the fact that he, by his own admission, exaggerated his achievements as a soldier. That is inexcusable in the army.

Since this morning, I have been listening to the speeches given by all of the members opposite, and I think that it is shameful that they are hiding behind the army, the men and women who are currently serving. The members opposite are talking more about the army than about the minister's behaviour. They are making the same mistake as the minister by using the army to try to defend the indefensible.

Winston Churchill said, "We are masters of the unsaid words, but slaves of those we let slip out."

Does my colleague agree with the minister who said that he was the architect of Operation Medusa?

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, actions speak louder than words, and that is exactly what the minister has been doing. He has been acting. We have not seen a defence policy review in over 20 years. There are many governments to blame for this, but it took 20 years and the current minister to do a defence policy review. In my riding, I held consultations, and several veterans and members of the Canadian Armed Forces showed up for that consultation. They thanked the minister, who is taking action in order to protect our men and women in the armed forces, to make sure they have what they need to protect Canadians.

Government Orders

Many have come forward. Chris Vernon, chief of staff of Operation Medusa, called the minister “a critical member of the planning and design team”. Retired Major-General Lewis MacKenzie said that he considered the minister to be one of the architects of Operation Medusa.

Mr. Luc Berthold: But has he thought about what he said?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: These are people who were in the room, Madam Speaker. These are people who know what they are talking about.

Mr. Luc Berthold: But is he sorry?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The leader of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I would remind the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who just asked the question, to be respectful and allow the member to answer the question. If he has another question, then I would suggest that he stand and ask it.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, actions do speak louder than words, and the problem is that the minister, through no fault of anyone else, has put himself in this situation by claiming that he took different actions at different times. I have listened all day, and I also heard the minister speak. It is not the fault of anyone, other than himself, for being in the situation of having three different scenarios. We have yet to hear from the minister as to what the truth is with regard to his actions, which are pertinent to his job and credibility, among not only his colleagues here but the military service. Using his military service as a shield for Liberal actions is a rather insulting way to go about apologizing.

The minister has claimed that (a), he played a key role as an intelligence officer; (b) was a reservist working on capacity building for Aghan police; or (c) was the architect of Operation Medusa. Was it (a), (b), or (c)?

• (1735)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Madam Speaker, the minister has apologized, and we must move forward from this. He has apologized and remains focused on making sure that our brave and women are equipped and trained to face the difficult tasks ahead of them. It was stated that he was one of the architects and part of the design and planning team by those who were leading this operation. I believe the minister has done a great service for his country where this operation is concerned.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to continue this debate by focusing on one of the more substantive issues that have been brought up today and to further expand on some of what the Minister of National Defence has already said. I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the importance of Canada's fleet of fighter jets and the need to ensure this capability continues while meeting our commitments at home and abroad.

I am sure all parliamentarians recognize that situational awareness and the capability to respond over Canada's vast land mass, maritime approaches, and airspace are vital to exercising Canadian sovereignty. Canada's CF-18 fleet provides significant support to that awareness. I also remind the House that numerous times in recent

years our fighters have intercepted Russian bombers capable of carrying cruise missiles that were exported beyond advanced fighters. In fact, they have been intercepted with a frequency at times nearing that of the height of the Cold War.

Beyond Canada's borders, we also have a responsibility to do our part to defend the continent at large. We need to be on guard not only for Canada, but also for our closest neighbour and ally, the United States. This defence relationship, known as the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, is fundamental to our mutual security.

As chair of our Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, I would like to also assure the House that our membership and commitment to the NATO alliance is also very important and highly valued by our allies, particularly with respect to our upcoming mission in Latvia as one of the framework nations.

It is important to understand that other countries' military are not the only threat we face. Since 9/11, NORAD has been prepared to defend against attacks involving civilian aircraft. NORAD also played a major support role for high-profile events like the Vancouver Olympics, as well as G7 and G20 meetings both in Canada and the U.S. Whatever the assigned mission, our forces need the capability to act as and when required, and recent events underline the very real need to be able to intercept aircraft to control Canadian and continental airspace.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Canada's current fleet of CF-18s is aging and needs replacing—

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, just so it is not confusing for the public, for the official record, it is Madam Speaker. I know Mr. Speaker is continually referred to, but it is Madam Speaker.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the intervention from the member for Windsor West and I understand as well that sometimes the speeches are already written and I do not take any offence.

The hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: My sincere apologies, Madam Speaker.

At the time these aircraft were acquired in the early 1980s, the government bought 138 fighters, with a plan to fly them for 20 years, yet here we are today, over 30 years later, and we are still flying these jets. The passage of time and usage has taken its toll on these aircraft, and our original fleet is now reduced from 138 to 76 airplanes.

Government Orders

There is no question that the women and men of the Royal Canadian Air Force have done and continue to do great work with the resources they have been given. The Canadian Armed Forces is also doing a tremendous job risk-managing our ability to simultaneously meet our NORAD and NATO commitments with the current fighter fleet. However, the reality is that we now face a capability gap in meeting these commitments. The challenge is that the older planes are less reliable and are more difficult to maintain. Maintenance hours relative to operational available hours have increased significantly, and to keep the aircraft both operationally capable and safe for our pilots, they must regularly be removed from the flight line more often to be serviced.

Maintenance of any aircraft is important, and unquestionably, the government will continue to apply additional resources to the CF-18s and is doing so now. Even with the application of additional resources, there comes a point at which the risk becomes too great for the government to accept. If we do not move quickly to supplement and replace our fighter capability, we will be left with limited flexibility to respond to both domestic and world events and limited capability to fulfill our multilateral obligations.

We have been clear that the risk of relying solely on a more than 30-year-old fighter fleet is one our government is not willing to accept. To be a reliable partner and ally, Canada must ensure that we meet our NORAD and NATO commitments. Canada's fighter capability now and in the future must be able to defend Canada, defend North America, in partnership with the U.S., and support international operations. There can be no debate. We must act now to ensure the current and future viability of our fighter fleet.

As this government announced on November 22, we are taking a three-step approach to addressing the capability gap.

First, we announced that we will launch an open and transparent competition to replace the CF-18s. Given the time it will take to conduct such a competition to acquire a permanent fleet, we must also explore an interim solution to supplement our current CF-18 fleet. That is why, on the same day, it was announced that we would explore the potential acquisition of 18 new Super Hornet aircraft to supplement the current CF-18s for an interim period, until the transition to the permanent replacement aircraft is complete.

As part of this exploration, we are in discussions with the United States government and Boeing—

● (1740)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize for interrupting the hon. member. On a point of order, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I have been listening for the last three minutes to the member talk about procurement and Super Hornets. I would remind the member that Standing Order 11(2) states that members stay relevant to the conversation today. There is an opposition motion before the House. As much as I would love to discuss the failures of the government on procurement, it is not relevant to the discussion today.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sure the member knows full well that there is latitude when there is discussion. I am sure that the member is going to get to her point on

the opposition day motion. Relevancy has to be part of the discussion. As I mentioned, there is some latitude when members are speaking on specific issues, and I am sure the member will get to that point.

The hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Speaker, parliamentarians and the public can rest assured that this government's commitment to addressing the capability gap is unwavering. We will launch an open and transparent competition, and in the meantime, we will continue to explore the acquisition of the Super Hornets to apply additional resources to our CF-18s. The Royal Canadian Air Force and all Canadians can be confident that we will not put our men and women in uniform or our country at undue risk.

As the House is aware, the Government of Canada will soon announce a new defence policy that will ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces are prepared to face defence challenges and to contribute to a more stable world, now and into the future. The government will release this new defence policy for Canada in the very near future, and it will deliver on our commitment to achieve Canada's defence objectives and to be unwavering in our support for our men and women in uniform.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, we heard a lot about procurement and Super Hornets, but today's notice of motion is a confidence motion that the House has lost confidence in the minister and his abilities to carry out his responsibilities on behalf of the government, since on multiple occasions the minister misrepresented his military service and provided misleading information to the House.

I listened to the minister speaking here, and there were three versions of descriptions the minister has claimed his role and responsibilities have been. There are three different interpretations from the minister himself, one being that he claimed a key role as an intelligence officer. The second was he talked about being a reservist, working on capacity-building for Afghan police. The third version was that he was an architect of Operation Medusa. What I would like to know from the hon. member is if it is the first, second, or third.

● (1745)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Speaker, I can safely say that I was not in the room where it happened and that I was neither asked for nor responsible to determine the answer to that question.

However, there was a member of Parliament who is not here but who was responsible.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind the member she should not mention who is in the room and who is not in the room.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Speaker, there is a member of Parliament who is charged with that responsibility, and it is his responsibility to ensure that the people he appoints to his cabinet have the qualifications and the confidence of him and the cabinet, and that would be our Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has the confidence and the information to make an informed decision, and then we have the confidence in our Prime Minister.

Government Orders

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am just curious. I would like to ask my colleague opposite who wrote her speech for her.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Speaker, I was fortunate enough to have a father who served in the Canadian Forces for 36 years, and he retired as a major general. I have a husband who also served as an air force officer. I was also fortunate to attend Royal Military College and I served as an air force officer.

I have friends across the country at all rank levels who both continue to serve or who have been retired for many years. I can safely say that on many occasions they have told me that they have confidence in our country, our government, and the Prime Minister and those whom he has chosen to serve in his cabinet in all roles.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out the great confidence I and so many Canadians have in our Minister of National Defence. I am very proud of the minister's service on behalf of Canada.

It is more important we talk about the work of the minister as the defence minister. Could the member tell the House a bit more about the work happening on the defence file presently, making best policies for our men and women in uniform?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Speaker, we are very fortunate to have a government and a minister who has taken on the responsibility of conducting a comprehensive defence policy review. One has not happened in at least 20 years, if not longer.

I was fortunate enough to be on the team, as a low-level person, when the original white paper was written for defence in 1995. We now have another opportunity to make a comprehensive assessment of exactly where we are in the country on defence, what the requirements are, and what the changing landscape across the globe is. We are in an unprecedented period of change and instability, and we have not seen this kind of tectonic shift and unprecedented challenges for at least 25 or 30 years.

We as a nation have to ensure that we understand what that changing landscape looks like and what the threats are, not only from nations but from non-state actors, and not only from conventional warfare but from cyber-threats, hacking, and asymmetric threats. We are in an unprecedented time of need, and the defence policy review is an important piece for us going forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

After listening to my Liberal colleagues for half an hour, I think it is important to reread today's opposition motion because we have heard more about what soldiers will receive, and especially not receive, from the Liberals than we have about today's opposition motion. The motion moved by my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman reads as follows:

That the House has lost confidence in the Minister of National Defence's ability to carry out his responsibilities on behalf of the government since, on multiple occasions the Minister misrepresented his military service and provided misleading information to the House.

I want to echo the sentiments of all my colleagues who have thanked Canadian Armed Forces members for helping the people of Gatineau and throughout Quebec who are dealing with unbelievably terrible flooding.

Today, May 8, 2017, we are celebrating the 72nd anniversary of the victory over Hitler's Germany. It is known as Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day. I want to talk about a man who played an important role in that victory. His name is Paul Triquet. He received the Victoria Cross, one of the highest honours in the hierarchy of military medals.

Paul Triquet was from Cabano, a municipality in the riding of Témiscouata, in the Lower St. Lawrence region. He was a Second World War hero who served his country with the Royal 22nd Regiment, among others. He rose through the ranks of the Canadian army and ended his distinguished career as a brigadier general.

He took part in the Italian campaign as a captain in his regiment. He particularly distinguished himself in the attack on Casa Berardi on December 14, 1943. For all he did, he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for valour in the British army and the Commonwealth. He was also awarded the Legion of Honour, and was the only French Canadian to win the Victoria Cross during the Italian campaign.

Paul Triquet is a hero of the Second World War. His remarks were published in the Bulletin d'histoire politique published by the Association québécoise d'histoire politique. Here is how he described his military career: "By awarding me this decoration, I think the King wanted to recognize the merit of the Canadians in general, and not just one individual."

That is how a leader in the Canadian Armed Forces behaves. A leader who was awarded this highest honour did not even take credit for that distinction. Instead, he wanted to share the honour with all Canadians who served their country.

I would like to quote another illustrious Second World War figure. After announcing to the world the end of hostilities on the European continent on the BBC, Winston Churchill made two speeches on May 8, 1945 before the crowd in Whitehall Road, in London, celebrating the Allied victory over Nazi Germany.

God bless you all. This is your victory! It is the victory of the cause of freedom in every land. In all our long history we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man or woman, has done their best. Everyone has tried. My dear friends, this is your hour. This is not victory of a party or of any class. It is a victory of the great British nation as a whole.

Did Winston Churchill, who definitely was one of the architects of the Allied victory in the Second World War, take credit for it? No, because a leader does not do that. A leader will give credit for the success of military campaigns to his men, to the men and women who fought for him.

I purposely gave the example of a military man and an elected official because, during a war, elected officials and military forces must trust one another, and this is true in all countries. When an elected official manages the military, this relationship of trust is even more important.

We are here today not to discuss the military past of the Minister of National Defence, but to speak about his role as minister. We want to talk about what he said he did when he was a member of the military. Instead of giving credit to his men, to all the men and women who were there with him, this minister made a choice.

• (1750)

The minister chose to take all the credit for a great Canadian victory in Afghanistan. It seems that he did it twice. The first time was when he was seeking election. He was just getting involved in politics and he realized that he might be able to win a few more votes and even get a spot in cabinet if he took credit for a victory that was not necessarily his own. The second time was when he was minister. That is unacceptable for someone who served in the Canadian Armed Forces and who is now the minister responsible for those same armed forces.

I believe that this is more than just a mistake on the part of the Minister of National Defence. The minister betrayed the trust of the men and women who are currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. He betrayed the bond of trust that must unite them with the elected officials responsible for leading them. These elected officials are the ones who are responsible for leading and deciding what tools are needed. They are responsible for deciding what operations our armed forces participate in and making sure they have the right equipment. Unfortunately, if the members of our armed forces no longer trust their minister, the relationship of trust is beyond repair.

I have here a copy of *The DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics*. It may seem that the code is only for members of the military, but that is not the case. Both members of the Canadian Armed Forces and employees of the Department of National Defence are asked to adhere to the same code, since they do business with each other.

Why? Because we know that one day we may have to defend the same issues before the same forum. We must understand one another. If we want our men and women in uniform to adhere to a certain standard within the forces, we must lead by example. The DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics, which I have here, covers this situation.

First of all, the Deputy Minister and Chief of the Defence Staff statement reads as follows:

Canadians rightfully expect the highest ethical behaviour from the people entrusted with the task of ensuring their defence.

Is falsely taking credit for a military operation an example of the highest ethical behaviour?

Chapter 1 on ethics talks about the role of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. It talks about the role of ministers, in particular:

Ministers are also responsible for preserving public trust and confidence in the integrity of management and operations of public sector organizations and for respecting the tradition of a professional non-partisan federal public sector, which includes DND, and of the CF. Furthermore, Ministers play a critical role in the ability of DND employees and CF members to provide professional and frank advice.

Once again, the minister should be leading by example. Unfortunately, on at least two separate occasions, including one very specific case where he had to wear two hats, the minister has failed to do this.

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When it comes to specific values and expected behaviours of people in the department and in the forces, it says:

DND employees and CF members shall serve the public interest by adhering to the highest ethical standards, communicating and acting with honesty, and avoiding deception.

In the section “Duties and Obligations”, it says:

CF members who are also in a leadership role have a particular responsibility to exemplify the military values of the Canadian Forces and the common values and expected obligations of the DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics.

In closing, I want to quote an article by Denis Ferland in *Le Devoir* of May 3, “Exaggeration, distortion, fiction, boasting, or outright lying?”

I think that the Prime Minister has to do something about this because it is abundantly clear that the Minister of National Defence is not going to. It is time for him to do the right thing and for the Minister of National Defence to step down in order for this broken bond of trust to be restored.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I certainly have tremendous trust in the Minister of National Defence, and I want to give a few reasons.

He is the first minister who stepped up and recognized that there needed to be a review of national defence funding and that there needed to be a strategy going forward for our military. He is committed to ensuring this is done. There are \$83 billion in investment in new projects for military operations. He signed onto NATO. He has supported our NORAD exercises.

If the member wants to talk about trust, let me ask him this. Why did the Conservative government tell the public it could buy 65 F-35s with \$9 billion, when we know today that this is not the case?

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I will answer with a question. Can the minister explain how he could dream up a so-called capability gap just so that he could then claim to need to change the contract and buy Super Hornets, all without a bidding process?

In my speech, I spoke of only two incidents that I believe jeopardize the trust that members of the Canadian Armed Forces have in the minister. However, now, the member has prompted me to question the trust that exists between the minister and the Canadian public because, not only did he exaggerate his role in Afghanistan, but he also made up facts to justify the action he is taking in his capacity as minister.

Government Orders

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was surprised by what my colleague said about what he believes to be a non-existent capability gap. He knows that we have an aging fleet of fighter jets that is over 30 years old. When the Conservatives were in office, they put off doing anything about the fighter jet procurement contract. It is a priority if we want to meet our obligations to Canadians by upholding Canada's sovereignty and defending North America with NORAD and NATO.

We made a commitment in the new defence policy statement that we would ensure that the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces have the training and equipment they need to meet their obligations. That is a must.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that if they have questions to ask, they should stand as opposed to yelling them across.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I believe that the parliamentary secretary should be careful about what he says in order not to find himself on the same slippery slope as the Minister of National Defence.

Lieutenant-General Michael Hood, commander of the air force, told the Standing Committee on National Defence:

...there is sufficient capacity to support a transition to a replacement fighter capability based on the ongoing projects and planned life extension to 2025 for the CF-18.

Once again, sadly, it is probably the Minister of National Defence who wrote the talking points for the parliamentary secretary because he is repeating the same alternative facts.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is not about his service. It is not about the \$12 billion that you just cut from the military.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the member to address his question to the Chair. I did not cut any money to the military.

Mr. Bev Shipley: It is not about the \$12 billion that were cut from the military budget, Madam Speaker. This is about the credibility of a defence minister, who took the responsibility of others. He took it from them. He fabricated, not made a mistake, twice to build his own empire.

Is there a reason why the Liberals, at this stage, will not answer the question, other than to talk about the minister's service record, with which we agree?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, my answer will be brief. I find it truly deplorable today that our Liberal colleagues have used members of the Canadian military to defend and whitewash the unacceptable actions of the Minister of National Defence, which

have been condemned by many in the Canadian Armed Forces. Everyone who knows the military knows that you cannot act this way when you have served in the Canadian Armed Forces.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, the motion in front of us today reads, "That the House has lost confidence in the Minister of National Defence's ability to carry out his responsibilities on behalf of the government since, on multiple occasions the Minister misrepresented his military service and provided misleading information to the House", and has made false statements in the public domain.

I would like to structure my remarks as follows.

First, I would like to prove to my colleagues of all political stripes that the minister has in fact misled the House and why this is a cause for concern in carrying out legislative responsibilities as well as providing the resources and sound decisions that are required to lead Canada's military.

I want to start, as many of my colleagues have, by expressing our deep sense of gratitude and appreciation to all those who have served Canada as part of the Canadian Armed Forces. It is with that thanks that I want to separate out, as my colleague just mentioned, the fact that we are not evaluating the Minister of National Defence based on his service record in the Canadian Armed Forces; we are evaluating his capacity to lead in the position of Minister of National Defence.

First, has the minister in fact misled or misrepresented the House? That evidence is very clear. A lot of time has been spent today talking about his misrepresentation with respect to his role in Operation Medusa. If I have time, I will get back to that. However, it is very important to look at some of the other factors that have led to this motion being put forward in the House. This is not a motion that is made lightly.

I took umbrage with a comment made by the member for Brampton North. She said that the opposition had been trying to downgrade and diminish the reputation of the Minister of National Defence. To be clear, the opposition does not have any issue with the minister's service record prior to entering politics. The minister, in his own role, has diminished and downgraded his reputation. That is why we have the motion in front of the House of Commons today.

In late 2015, the minister said, "I haven't had one discussion about the CF-18s". This was in *The Globe and Mail* on December 21, 2015. However, emails sent by officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs state, "the Iraqi Minister of Defence was clearly focused on Canada's decision to withdraw its CF18 fighter jets from the coalition air strikes, asking [the defence minister] to reconsider this decision on numerous occasions..." A month later, the Minister of National Defence said that the Iraqi defence minister was ecstatic with the role Canada was playing. This is a deliberate misrepresentation of facts. This is incident number one where the Minister of National Defence has misled the House.

Government Orders

As well, Liberal budgets under the Prime Minister have cut billions of dollars from our defence budget. Budget 2016 cut \$3.7 billion from capital equipment projects and budget 2017 cut \$8.48 billion. The only budget increases the Canadian Armed Forces has seen in the past two years have come as a result of the defence escalator, which was a policy put in place under the previous Conservative government.

Under the watch of the Minister of National Defence, the Department of National Defence released classified information regarding Canada's military response to a 9/11-style attack.

There has been so much talk about procurement today, and one of the examples I find absolutely egregious is that in justifying the government's plan to break down its campaign promise and undertake a sole-source purchase of 18 Super Hornet fighter jets, the Minister of National Defence has repeatedly insisted that the RCAF faces a credibility gap. However, Lieutenant-General Michael Hood, commander of the air force, provided a statement to the House Standing Committee on National Defence in which he stated, "there is sufficient capacity to support a transition to a replacement fighter capability based on the ongoing projects and planned life extension to 2025 for the CF-18."

The comments the minister made about his role in Operation Medusa, when there were so many Canadian Armed Forces members who had a significant impact on actually building that mission out, I think was the straw that broke the camel's back. My concern, now that I have shown a record of how he has misled the House, is what impact that has on our men and women in uniform.

• (1805)

Much has been made by my colleagues opposite about the defence review. I do not think there is a single person in this House of Commons who is going to stand up and say that the military is where it needs to be in terms of provisioning or funding. We need to do more for the military, and it needs to be done in a very strategic way.

I also feel that there needs to be an entire rethink on how procurement looks, because it is this inertia, this bureaucratic craziness that really requires a lot of goodwill with the public service and a lot of commanding presence to be able to see change. That is something that needs to happen. A lot has been made about the defence review, and so forth, but it is now about the minister's ability to implement those changes.

The member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill wrote her speech for a reason. To me, many of the talking points that were in her speech sounded like what typically happens on a day like this, which is that the departmental staff from whatever department is involved have to spend probably two days writing speeches for government members. Members will notice that she also did not say who wrote her speech. Imagine being the Department of National Defence staff who had to spend the weekend writing speeches to defend the minister's record.

If we push that forward, nobody in this House can argue that there has not been so many former members of the armed forces or people who are in the armed forces right now who are not happy with the situation and who cannot write to members of Parliament or speak out. I could read quote after quote in that regard. How is the minister

going to have the political capability, the will, or the social licence within his own department to oversee the changes that he needs to make?

I believe the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill also said that the Prime Minister has full confidence in the minister. If the Prime Minister has full confidence in the minister right now, the Prime Minister's judgment also needs to be called into question. If he cannot look at the minister and say, "I am sure you have had an excellent service record, but this is over 18 months of poor performance in your role as a cabinet minister", then I think the Prime Minister's judgment also needs to be called into question.

My colleague from Chilliwack raised a question in the House of Commons last week for the Prime Minister with respect to the many other members of the Liberal caucus who have served in the armed forces, and who have both significant operational experience and leadership experience. If the Prime Minister wants to put somebody into the Ministry of National Defence who has a background in our armed forces, he has some people to choose from, such as the former government whip, which I believe is what the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill just said. There are people within his caucus who have this expertise. I do not understand why the Prime Minister and his caucus continue to stand up here and speak from a bunch of talking points on why the minister should have his job after it is very clear that this information has been misleading.

I expected the defence minister to stand up in this House this morning and refute some of the assertions that I had outlined in the front end of my speech, because I know my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman had done that. I expected him to be somewhat contrite, especially with respect to overstating his role in Operation Medusa. Instead, it was this bizarre jumble of talking points, which I think was probably the worst response he could have given in terms of addressing a House of Commons that is essentially assessing his capability to do the job going forward.

Today I had the opportunity to look online at our Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Code of Values and Ethics. Under section 4 in Annex A, it talks about public sector value, and 4.1 is "Respect for Democracy", which talks about the importance of the Canadian parliamentary system, and so forth. It states, "Public servants recognize that elected officials are accountable to Parliament, and ultimately to the Canadian people...."

We have seen the Minister of National Defence refuse to allow the House of Commons to debate whether or not we send troops to other areas. Under "Integrity" it states, "integrity is to have unconditional and steadfast commitment to a principled approach to meeting your obligations while being responsible and accountable for your actions." Why has the minister not done this?

In closing, it is for these reasons that I believe the House should support this motion.

• (1810)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have time for one question.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to read a quote from a British Army officer, Colonel Chris Vernon, an individual who has no vested interest in this. He said, “Without his input as a critical player, a major player, a pivotal player, I’d say Medusa, you know, wouldn’t have happened. We wouldn’t have had the intelligence and tribal picture to put the thing together.”

What is the message here to children? Is it if I do not apologize for misspeaking, which he clearly did, I should be dragged—

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but I want to give an opportunity for the member to answer, as the time is running out.

Could the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill give a brief answer, please?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, hopefully the message to children would be that when they sincerely mess up, they lose their job and that they should tell the truth to begin with.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, May 9, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this session I had the opportunity to ask the government about backlogs in privately sponsored refugee programs, but this has become an urgent issue, given the situation in Chechnya.

Since last month we have heard very serious reports out of Chechnya that gay men are being rounded up and taken to essentially what are acting as concentration camps.

These men are being tortured. We have heard reports of family members throwing gay men off roofs to kill them. Essentially what is happening in Chechnya right now against gay men is a pogrom. It is probably one of the most serious immediate threats to gay people in that part of the world.

We cannot deny that there are many LGBTQ members around the world who face persecution from governments that have policies to either torture or prosecute or persecute or kill or do worse, simply because of who they are and who they love, but certainly what is happening in Chechnya right now is of grave concern. This whole situation in Chechnya has really put into question the government's

ability to prioritize the most vulnerable when they come to Canada as well as to ensure that the privately sponsored refugee program works in situations like this, where there is an immediate need to see people come to safety in Canada.

There are a few things I would like to see the government do in this regard. Rainbow Refugee is a not-for-profit group that has done amazing work in helping to facilitate, through the private sponsorship stream, LGBTQ people who are persecuted around the world to come to Canada through our refugee program. The government has refused to commit to allowing this program to become an ongoing program, regularly funded through the government, and I would ask the government today if it would commit to doing that.

I would also ask if it would ensure through this program that there would be collaboration with private sponsorship agreement holders that are not impacted through the SAH caps. I would also ask that the government come up with a way to ensure faster processing times in situations such as the one I just described. We know that outside of the Middle East right now, processing times for the PSR program are between four and seven years.

I would also like to call upon the government today to formally denounce in every way possible the situation in Chechnya. We have not heard the government or the Prime Minister do this yet. I would also like to call upon the government to come up with ways beyond the talking points of relying on the UNHCR to select our refugees to come to Canada and to put forward a concerted effort to prioritize the most vulnerable.

The fact that the House took nearly 18 months to recognize the Yazidi genocide and then have any Yazidi refugees come to Canada shows a problem in the UNHCR selection process, because we know that the most persecuted cannot make it to these camps for selection.

There is a litany of asks that I think are very common sense, very non-partisan, and very Canadian. I am hoping that the government today would be able to finally answer some of these questions.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for Calgary Nose Hill for the question she asked on January 30, 2017, which I hope to answer today on behalf of the government. Once again, I thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to rise today on this important subject.

I want to assure the member that offering protection in a timely manner to government-sponsored refugees and those selected through private sponsorship is a priority for the government.

Adjournment Proceedings

Like many Canadians, and like the member herself, I am sure, I was heartened to see the spirit of generosity with which Canadians responded to the government's call for support in our efforts to resettle Syrian refugees in 2016. Despite the program's success, it comes with its share of challenges, including the tremendous interest demonstrated by private sponsors. We received many more applications than we were able to process within the limits of Canada's annual immigration levels, and that reality is what led to longer processing times and the need to impose restrictions on the number of new applications we can receive.

Canada's target for 2017 is to resettle 25,000 refugees, from all populations. Planned admissions for resettled refugees in 2017 are double those established for 2015 and in preceding years. Canada will welcome one of the highest numbers of refugees and protected persons in Canadian history and that is something we can proud of.

An important measure to reduce the number of applications to process and the wait time for privately sponsored refugees is the government's commitment to meet its 2017 admissions target of 16,000 privately sponsored refugees, which more than triples average admissions prior to 2015.

By increasing the annual target, we could process more applications, which will help reduce the number of applications to process as well as the wait time. At the same time, it is important that the government maintains its refugee programs. That is why the annual immigration levels plan has a target of 7,500 government-sponsored refugees and 1,500 blended visa office-referred refugees, which the hon. member is certainly aware of. Most privately sponsored refugees have family or community ties with their sponsors.

Without government sponsorship of refugees, people who need protection and have no family ties with people in Canada, and for whom resettlement in a third country is the only option, could not come to Canada. These people need government-sponsored refugee programs.

There are almost 60 million refugees and displaced people in the world. Canada will continue to take action and welcome people, no matter their religion or ethnic origin.

We can also take action to help countries that are receiving large numbers of refugees, such as Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, or any other country. We can contribute by trying to resolve conflicts and wars that have forced so many people to become refugees. Canada is in a unique position that allows it to have all kinds of positive influence on the outcomes for refugees around the world. That is what we plan on doing and that is what we are already doing.

Once again, I thank the member for her question and her noble intentions.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, perhaps I will ask the question in more direct and simple terms this time.

Will the government, which purports to stand up for human rights, prioritize and expedite privately sponsored or government-sponsored claims for refugees who are gay men in Chechnya who are currently facing a program, and under what timeline, and how many?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, I can assure the member that providing timely protection to privately sponsored refugees is a priority for this government. The government remains committed, now more than ever, to resettling privately sponsored refugees.

Contrary to the member's statement, as we previously announced, by the end of 2017, we plan to admit 16,000 privately sponsored refugees, which more than triples average admissions prior to 2015.

At the same time, it is important for the government to maintain its government-supported refugee programs, which is why the annual levels plan has a target of 7,500 government-assisted refugees, plus 1,500 refugees through the blended visa office-referred program. This will ensure the long-term success of the privately sponsored refugee program, which is and will remain an integral part of Canada's immigration program, one which we are proud of.

● (1825)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, on January 30, I stood in this House and asked that the Prime Minister retract what I considered to be condescending and out-of-touch comments that he made not once but twice. It has been 105 days since then, but he has done no such thing. I will share with members a bit of the background to these particular comments.

In Saskatoon at a town hall meeting on January 25, the Prime Minister was asked why very little of the funds promised in budget 2016 had actually made it to the communities that needed them the most. This was at a time when many communities had declared states of emergency over the suicide crisis. It was a particularly devastating time for many communities, which unfortunately still continues to this day.

What the Prime Minister did say was that money alone would not solve all the issues in remote indigenous communities. I actually agree. It is more than just money that is going to make a difference. Then the comments took a very bizarre turn. He stated:

I've spoken with a number of chiefs who said, "You know, we need a youth centre.... You know, we need TVs and lounges and sofas so they can hang around." And when a chief says that to me, I pretty much know they haven't actually talked to their young people because most of the young people I've talked to want a place to store their canoes and paddles so they can connect back out on the land and a place with internet access so they can do their homework.

Adjournment Proceedings

Instead of apologizing for painting all youth with the same brush, the Prime Minister actually repeated the same answer in Winnipeg. Some first nations chiefs have rightfully called him out. Numerous posts appeared on Twitter asking the Prime Minister to apologize. My parliamentary colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, wrote a tongue-in-cheek open letter in February calling for the creation of a national canoe and paddle program. He wrote:

As Prime Minister, you wrote to every member of Cabinet affirming that your relationship with Indigenous Peoples is the most important one, so who am I to argue with your recent comments that you know what is best for Indigenous youth facing so many critical issues including a suicide epidemic.

Like the member, I sit on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, which recently wrapped up a study of the ongoing and horrific suicide crisis among Canada's indigenous communities, and especially the youth. Many witnesses came forward with very powerful and emotional testimony, and also told us what they thought would make their lives better.

We heard that indigenous youth have far higher rates of suicide than the national average. We heard from parents who had lost children, chiefs who had lost community members, youth who had lost friends. One man testified that he wanted to take his own life at the age of 12. We heard from a heartbroken father who had lost his son just six months earlier. We heard of the need for consistent mental health services, good education, well-built homes, safe drinking water, recreational facilities, and opportunities for jobs. One passionate young man told us, "You see, a lot of suicides can be linked to low economic opportunity. They don't feel there's a lot for them out there. Sitting on welfare is not a great option for them and it gets depressing." Grand Chief Sheila North echoed those comments, talking about the need to provide hope, "How is a young man, a young father, and a young husband supposed to feel when they don't have any jobs...?"

The response by the Prime Minister was truly unacceptable, and I hope we have a different kind of response—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for raising this important issue. It is clear that the mental wellness of indigenous youth is a critical issue. Addressing and preventing indigenous youth suicide is and must always be a priority for our government.

It is for this reason that Health Canada provides over \$300 million annually to support the mental wellness needs of first nations and Inuit communities. These activities include mental health promotion, addictions and suicide prevention initiatives, crisis response services and after-care treatment, and supports for eligible former students of Indian residential schools and their families. Funding for community-based mental wellness programs is tailored by communities so that they are rooted in culture and meet the needs of the people whom they serve.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Our government is responding to the mental wellness needs of indigenous youth by adopting an approach based on strengths and supporting community-based wellness initiatives that include aspects of language and culture, physical fitness, the arts, and on-the-land activities. We are improving access to mental health services.

[*English*]

Budget 2017 proposes an investment of \$204.5 million over five years to increase support for first nations and Inuit mental health services, programming, and access to mental health professionals, including traditional healers.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind the House that, on June 13, 2016, the Prime Minister announced approximately \$69 million over three years to meet the immediate mental health needs of first nations and Inuit communities.

[*English*]

This funding is enhancing capacity at local and regional levels to provide essential mental health services that respond to both the current crisis and to prevention.

[*Translation*]

This funding will help to meet the following objectives: create new mental health crisis intervention teams; increase the number of first nations and Inuit communities served by mental wellness teams; provide training for front-line workers; support Inuit-specific approaches to mental wellness and suicide prevention; and, finally, provide access to a first nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line that respects the culture of these peoples.

In July 2016, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami or ITK released its national Inuit suicide prevention strategy. Our government invested \$9 million over three years to help implement it. Our government is working with ITK and Inuit partners to determine further actions moving forward.

In addition, Health Canada provides coverage for mental health counselling services through the non-insured health benefits program. This mental health coverage is available to all non-insured health benefits clients, including youth, and is designed to provide coverage for necessary consultations with mental health professionals.

[*English*]

Budget 2017 proposes to provide new funding for the NIHB program, making it easier for individuals and families to access culturally appropriate health care, prenatal escorts, and expanding access to mental health professionals. As well, \$15 million were announced for harm reduction measures as part of the Canadian drug and substance strategy.

There is more I could mention. Perhaps I will have more time in my rebuttal.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, the witnesses who appeared before us, at over 19 meetings, spoke of the real needs of indigenous youth.

Members of all parties in the House heard from chiefs, parents, experts, mental health workers, departmental officials, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and youth. To be frank, in those meetings and community visits canoe storage never came up. That rather flippant comment, even though it is many months later, still hurts. We still look forward to an apology with respect to what really were some condescending and stereotypical comments.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, our government supports the mental wellness needs of first nations and Inuit youth by funding initiatives to improve access to mental health programs and services in their communities.

In addition to the over \$300 million provided annually to community-based mental wellness supports, our government recently announced an additional \$69 million over three years to address immediate mental wellness needs.

[Translation]

This new funding creates new mental health crisis intervention teams, increases the number of communities served by local multidisciplinary mental wellness teams, invests in training for workers, supports the national Inuit suicide prevention strategy, and provides the toll free 24-hour first nations and Inuit hope for wellness help line.

Our government is also implementing Jordan's principle. Since the announcement of up to \$382.5 million in July 2016, work has begun to proactively take measures to put first nations children first and prevent jurisdictional disputes from arising. All cases that have been brought forward to date have been treated with care and diligence.

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rose in this House with regard to issues on the Canada-U.S. border related to the provision of services for Canadians with permanent resident status or landed immigrant status. The Trump initiative would actually set out a ban that would prevent these individuals from entering the United States.

Why this is pertinent, for those who are not from my area, is that the Windsor-Detroit region has a significant portion of the trade between Canada and the United States. In fact, 35% of Canada's daily trade with the United States takes place within two kilometres of the border. As well, about 10,000 health care professionals per day cross into the United States to provide services in their hospital system.

We also rely on emergency services in the United States. If we want to travel up the highway, it could take up to two hours to get to London facilities. When we have premature babies, women with high-risk pregnancies, or children who have some type of health emergency, it is often quicker to get them to the Detroit region. It also applies to adults.

In fact, one of the first cases we dealt with related to this problem was an ambulance carrying a patient who was actually having a heart attack and was going across the Canada-U.S. border to get to medical treatment. It was delayed at the border from getting to medical treatment, literally a kilometre away. It was not because the proper process had not taken place but was because of documentation. That problem was fixed, and a protocol was put in place.

The Trump initiative has turned things upside down, so to speak. We had a number of different questions from our hospitals related to ensuring that children in life-and-death situations or mothers with high-risk pregnancies would be allowed to get into the United States. That is important, because the victims of these policies could be anyone, from a refugee to someone with permanent resident status.

Let us look at it in terms of the two groups. Refugees are those Canada has allowed to come into Canada. They have gone through the proper security process and screening. They are predominantly women and some children who might need medical attention right away.

With regard to refugees' contributions to Canada, we just have to look at our governor generals or out in the world. Albert Einstein was a refugee. These individuals can go on and have gone on to do tremendous things.

Permanent residents, who are also under suspicion and may not be allowed into the United States, also have an issue. They have gone through our vetting or immigration process and are just waiting for the test to be applied to them. Again, we are talking about individuals who are either women who are pregnant or children who are vulnerable because of medical conditions.

The question was about sorting this out. At the time, the minister indicated that they had protocols in place. The fact is that I was in constant discussions with border people and protocol people from the hospitals, and there was no certainty.

I would like an update. On the border we do not have much of a choice. Again, these are life-and-death situations we are talking about. These are people who have been vetted through the entire system, and once again, they are extremely vulnerable women and children.

• (1835)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): As you know, Madam Speaker, the United States issued an executive order on March 6, 2017, introducing measures restricting travel for certain nationalities. The executive order was expected to come into effect on March 16, 2017. However, it is our understanding that court orders in the U.S. are currently suspending the implementation of certain provisions of the executive order.

Adjournment Proceedings

Individuals travelling to the United States should always verify U.S. admission requirements prior to their travel. Ultimately, the U.S., like Canada and all countries, has the sovereign right to decide who can enter its territory. However, the government continues to work with our U.S. counterparts to ensure that Canadian citizens and permanent residents can continue to travel to the U.S. and continue to contribute to the strong personal and economic ties between our two countries.

Should the executive order come fully into effect, our understanding from the United States is that Canadian citizens and Canadian permanent residents with valid Canadian permanent resident cards and valid U.S. visas, who are eligible to travel to the U.S., would not be denied entry into the United States.

Some people are wondering about how a reimplemented executive order would affect Canada's refugee and in-Canada asylum policies. I can assure the House that Canada has and will continue to have a strong asylum system that provides protection to those in genuine need.

The government will continue to monitor the status of the order and to work with situations regarding entry into the United States as they arise. We also look forward to working with the U.S. as it reviews parts of its resettlement programs.

Canada will continue to be a country that welcomes immigrants and refugees. The member rightfully pointed out, and I could not agree more when he talks about the value of refugees. He quoted Albert Einstein. Our very own immigration minister is a refugee. We have to recognize the value that refugees and immigrants bring to our country when they arrive on our shores.

Regarding the issue he brought before the House on January 31, we will continue to keep Canadians informed.

• (1840)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, what I am concerned about and will be looking forward to is further work to stop an accident from taking place, which we know could potentially happen. There appear to be some issues still pending with regard to refugees in terms of clarity, because if they are a refugee settled into the Windsor

region, there are not the support services necessary there. That is an issue. Also, the interpretation of the border service agencies in the United States could put people at risk in this process.

National Nurses Week is coming up. That is very important. I noted in my precursor that we have a surplus of educated people, in many respects, which the United States draws upon to work in the United States, to save lives every single day. I remind them of that when I am in Washington. The nurses in our region, not only on the American side but on the Canadian side, have made a strong well-being for the living conditions we have.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, as you know, a new executive order was issued on March 6, 2017 introducing measures restricting travel for certain nationalities.

However, it seems that court orders are currently preventing the executive order from being implemented. As the situation evolves, we continue to work with our American counterparts to ensure that permanent residents and citizens of Canada can continue to travel to the United States under the same conditions that have always applied. In January, the Minister received assurances from the United States that Canadian citizens and Canadian permanent residents with valid permanent resident cards, and who are eligible to travel to the U.S., would not be denied entry into the country.

We strongly encourage people wishing to travel to the United States to check whether they satisfy U.S. admission requirements before they leave. The government will continue to communicate with representatives within the U.S. administration in order to monitor the status of the executive order and keep Canadians abreast of the situation.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

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