



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 243 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Friday, December 1, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, December 1, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2017, NO. 2

Hon. Mélanie Joly (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-63, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2017 and other measures, be read the third time and passed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I wish to remind hon. members of the Speaker's ruling of Wednesday, November 8, 2017, regarding Bill C-63, a second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2017 and other measures.

[*English*]

At that time, the Chair indicated that pursuant to Standing 69.1 the question on the motion for second reading would be divided to provide for separate votes on measures that were not announced in the budget.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker also indicated that the vote at third reading will be conducted in a similar way if all of the identified elements are still part of the bill.

[*English*]

As that is the case, pursuant to Standing Order 69.1 the question will be divided at the third reading stage as follows: agriculture and fisheries co-operatives; GST/HST rebate for public service bodies; Excise Tax Act in relation to beer made from concentrate; Financial Administration Act in relation to the discharge of debt; all the remaining elements of the bill.

I would like to remind members that when putting the question on groups of clauses for Bill C-63, I intend to follow a procedure similar to that outlined in Standing Order 76.1(8) for the putting of the question on amendments at report stage.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to participate in today's debate.

As hon. members know, our government came to office with a plan to grow the middle class and to grow the economy. Bill C-63 is the next step toward this goal.

The bill would help to make the tax system fairer and more efficient. This bill also includes measures to give federally regulated workers the right to request more flexible work arrangements from their employer, largely benefiting women, who continue to do the majority of unpaid work at home. Also proposed is the elimination of unpaid internships in federally regulated sectors that are not part of a formal educational program, and providing labour standard protections for unpaid interns who are part of an educational program.

Bill C-63 also provides yet another building block in our overall climate change strategy. Through the bill the government is taking action to ensure that Canadian exploration expense treatment for the oil and gas sector is effectively limited to unsuccessful exploration or early stage exploration where the linkage to success cannot reasonably be determined in the year the activity takes place. We believe these measures will be an important part of Canada's pursuit of a low-carbon economy.

If we look at the measures in Bill C-63, I think we can all agree that this legislation is an important step in our plan to build an economy that works for the middle class and those working hard to join it.

However, before I speak about the next steps in our plan, I would like to talk about how we got where we are today, and the signs that tell us our plan to build a stronger middle class and grow the Canadian economy is working.

First, let us look at what we inherited.

Just two years ago, the world economy was still in recovery. Canadians were feeling as though they were working harder than ever, but they just were not getting ahead. During the last election campaign we debated whether Canada was in or heading into a recession. There were grounds for that concern. The median real wage income of Canadians had barely risen over the previous 30 years.

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The global economic environment was, and to a large extent still is, very uncertain. The fact is that when we talk to people across the country, there is a lot of anxiety that the next generation, our kids and grandkids, may not be as well off. Our government wants to ensure we create the conditions for all Canadians to succeed in a changing economy.

To get there, the government is committed to ensuring a healthy, thriving business environment and to protecting the ability of Canadian businesses to invest, grow and create jobs.

Let us look at where we are right now.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

I would now like to focus on the state of our economy and the recent measures in the government's fall economic statement, which is a continuation of the government's plan put in place in 2015. Our past two budgets laid the foundation for this plan and we built on it in last month's fall statement.

The government's plan to invest in people and in our country's future is based on the belief that when we have an economy that works for the middle class, we have a country that works for everyone.

I think it is fair to say that there are many clear signs that the government's plan is working.

The Canadian economy is currently the fastest growing in the G7, with an average growth of 3.7% over the last four quarters.

This is due in large part to increased consumer confidence, a direct result of programs like the Canada child benefit, which puts more money in the pockets of moms and dads, so they can pay off debt, buy sports equipment for their children, or buy healthier food. Our government is providing a bit of breathing room for Canadian households that greatly need it.

[*English*]

Everywhere we look, there are signs of progress for the middle class.

Over 600,000 new jobs have been created since 2015, and the unemployment rate is nearly the lowest it has been in a decade. Canadian economic growth has accelerated sharply since the second half of 2016. Over the last four quarters, the Canadian economy has had its fastest rate of growth in more than a decade, and growth is forecast to be 3.1% in 2017, significantly above expectations at the beginning of the year.

These gains, coupled with a better than expected fiscal outcome in 2016-17, have resulted in a real positive improvement to our budget outlook.

In fact, Canada's fiscal outlook has improved by over \$6.5 billion annually on average compared to what we expected back in March. The federal debt-to-GDP ratio has been firmly placed on a downward track, with Canada's net debt-to-GDP ratio projected to remain the lowest in the G7. Our government is committed to preserving Canada's low-debt advantage for current and future generations.

The actions the government has taken are having a real, positive impact on our economy and for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to expand on how our government's fall economic statement will keep us on this positive trajectory.

Canada's strong economy is giving our government the ability to reinvest the benefits of growth back into the people who have contributed most to that success. This is why we are strengthening the Canada child benefit, to ensure it continues to play a vital role in supporting families for years to come.

The Canada child benefit will be bolstered by annual cost of living increases starting in July 2018, which is two years ahead of schedule.

The government had previously committed to indexing the Canada child benefit to inflation as of July 2020. However, our economic growth and our improved fiscal record have allowed our government to achieve this commitment two years ahead of schedule, which is excellent news for Canadian families.

We are also putting money in the pockets of low-income Canadians by increasing the working income tax benefit by \$500 million more per year as of 2019. This benefit will ultimately be 65% higher than it was when we came to power.

I remind members that the working income tax benefit is a refundable tax credit that supplements the earnings of low-income workers, the people who are working hard to get into the middle class, such as young, single workers who are struggling to carve out a place on the job market.

[*English*]

The working income tax benefit provides important income support and helps to ensure that work is rewarded. This \$500 million enhancement announced in the fall economic statement is in addition to the increase of about \$250 million annually that will come into effect in that year as part of the enhancement of the Canada pension plan. These two actions will boost the total amount the government spends on the working income tax benefit by about 65% in 2019, increasing benefits to current recipients and expanding the number of Canadians receiving that much-needed support.

This will give a needed boost to well over 1.5 million low-income workers as they work long hours, sometimes in more than one job, to advance their careers and support themselves and their families. Whether this extra money is used for things such as helping to cover the family grocery bill or helping to pay for work-related expenses, the improved benefit will help low-income working Canadians make ends meet.

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•(1015)

[*Translation*]

We are also helping small businesses invest, grow, and create jobs by lowering the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019. We are making sure that Canada's low corporate tax rates serve to support businesses, not to provide unfair tax advantages to the wealthiest 1% of Canadians.

The investments we have made in our country's people, communities, and economy are producing results. They are putting more money in the pockets of those who need it the most, creating good, well-paying jobs, and giving Canadians more confidence in their future.

That is why we are doubling down on a plan that has been proven to work and reinvesting in the middle class, which, need I remind the House, was neglected by the previous government for a decade.

[*English*]

I would like to take a moment to discuss another measure in Bill C-63.

It is important for Canadians to have the confidence that our tax system is fair, simple, and efficient and that we have a growing and healthy economy. Initial action to implement changes from the comprehensive tax expenditure review conducted by the government were introduced in budget 2017. The review had a broad scope, which included corporate income tax expenditures, personal income tax expenditures, as well as goods and services tax expenditures. As part of the tax expenditure review, the government considered billed-basis accounting.

[*Translation*]

Billed-basis accounting is a method that allows certain designated professionals to declare expenses for tax purposes before the income related to those expenses is included in their revenue. It was eliminated in the 1980s for all professionals, except those in certain designated professions. Back then, those professionals could not access the small business deduction except under very limited circumstances, which put them at a disadvantage. That is no longer the case today.

With Bill C-63, the government is proposing to eliminate the option of using billed-basis accounting for income tax purposes for a limited group of professionals in order to avoid giving these professionals a tax benefit that other taxpayers do not have access to.

We intend to implement this measure in a fair and reasonable manner and give professionals the time they need to adjust and adapt. We are acting on the feedback we have received, and we are planning to extend the phase-in period to five years.

I would also like to reassure the House that this measure should not affect the legal services provided through legal aid or on a pro bono basis. It will not have any impact on the agreements regarding contingency fees, under which a lawyer is paid only if the client receives money. The Canada Revenue Agency has indicated that work in progress could be considered to have no value until a payment is made.

In summary, the government is committed to ensuring that the tax system puts everyone on an equal footing, and we are convinced that this measure will contribute to greater equity among professionals.

[*English*]

The government's plan will help strengthen the middle class and ensure Canadians have the support, resources, and confidence they need to succeed, create jobs, and grow our economy.

Economic growth is strong and because of that, we are in a position to do even more to help the middle class and those working hard to join it. We will ensure Canadians have the skills, training, and learning opportunities they need to compete and thrive in the rapidly changing global economy.

[*Translation*]

We are continuing to invest in public transit, our commercial networks, and cleaner water to keep our cities moving and to keep Canadians safe.

We will continue to build a better future for the middle class and all Canadians, no matter their circumstances. We want to ensure that they have a real chance to reach their full potential.

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the job numbers are out. The Canadian economy created 80,000 jobs, bringing down the unemployment rate to 5.9%, the lowest since February 2008. It is the 12th straight month of positive job creation, the best since March 2007. It is the 12th month of full-time job creation and the best in 18 years.

Did this excellent news happen due to the income tax cuts for the middle class, or the investments we made in infrastructure, or the investments we made in innovation and skills training?

•(1020)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, it is probably a mix of all the factors he mentioned, but it is important to look back at where Canada stood when we arrived in Ottawa as the Liberal government. In the last election campaign, Canadians were debating, and rightfully so, whether Canada was in or heading into a recession. We had sluggish employment growth. Our GDP growth, in the decade the Conservatives were in power, was the worst since the Second World War.

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We were in a situation where Canadians voted for a plan. Interest rates were low, and we knew that there was a need for infrastructure spending in communities across the country. I have spoken to a lot of mayors who can confirm this. I am sure that all MPs in this House know about the dire need for infrastructure spending in all their communities. Therefore, when we came into office, we looked at that situation, and we decided that while interest rates were low, it was important to invest and to make sure that we not only invested in infrastructure but reduced inequalities. We know that when inequalities are on a downward trend, economic growth is better. We have seen it in Scandinavian countries, for instance. They can attest to that. They have had good economic growth while they have maintained inequalities at the lowest possible level. That is where we wanted to go.

It is a plan that has been approved by international institutions. Christine Lagarde, of the IMF, said that Canada's approach should go viral, that this approach should be emulated by other countries in the world, and that the smartest thing to do would be to invest in Canadians and invest in infrastructure while interest rates are low to boost the economy and get better growth. It would help improve the state's fiscal position. That is exactly what we have done, and the results speak for themselves. These are today's numbers: 600,000 jobs created since we took office.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hopefully I am allotted the same amount of time as our hon. colleague across the way to answer that last question.

I just arrived from Quebec City, where I toured the Davie shipyard yesterday with our colleagues. I met a number of proud employees who are there working on the *Asterix* ship. It is incredible work the Davie shipyard is doing, and I know that our hon. colleague is aware of it.

I also know that the Liberals like to say that Canadians are telling them that they are doing a great job. I know for a fact, because I heard this from many people yesterday, that the hon. colleague himself has taken a lot of heat in that area, specifically in some radio and media interviews. They ask why rather than spending money on, say, the Asia infrastructure bank, the government is not spending money on what is perhaps the oldest marine fleet in the world. Our Canadian Coast Guard has one of the oldest marine fleets in the world. We have icebreakers that are beyond their notional lifespan, and the government has dithered away two years putting our economic viability, our Arctic sovereignty, at risk. It is putting coastal communities, maritime fishers, and shipping at risk. The government is continuing to put its eyes overseas, rather than focusing here at home.

When are the Liberals going to start focusing on Canadians and spending money here that is actually creating jobs, and when are they going to allow the Davie shipyard to reach its full potential and purchase and approve some icebreakers?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his visit to my beautiful region of Quebec City. I am very proud of Davie and its workers and what they have produced with the *Asterix*. It is a source of pride for my region. I have worked very hard with Davie and its union representatives to make sure that it can show its full potential in the competitive process we have in place for icebreakers, as the member mentioned.

However, it is a little rich to see Conservatives go and do photo ops at the Davie shipyard. When the member for Lévis—Lotbinière was sitting at the cabinet table when the national shipbuilding strategy was approved under the previous government, nothing was left for Davie, and now he is going to do photo ops at the Davie shipyard. He should hang his head in shame.

● (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech.

When debating a budget, or in this case, a budget implementation bill, we often talk about the measures set out in that budget. However, it is also important to talk about what is missing. I want to talk about a commitment that the NDP and the Liberals made regarding the tax loophole on CEO stock options.

I am raising this issue because it is disappointing to see that the Liberals have not closed this loophole after two years in office. What is more, they are eliminating the public transit tax credit and other tax credits. I want to ask my colleague to explain the rationale behind eliminating the public transit tax credit while keeping a tax credit for CEOs who are buying stocks in their own companies.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: : Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

I believe that our government is committed to making our tax system fairer where we see it is lacking. I think that my colleague has made some valid suggestions. We are open to looking at the different options available to enhance the fairness of our tax system.

We must acknowledge that the public transit tax credit had very little impact. Again, you have to pay taxes in order to receive a tax credit. We are making historic investments in public transit. We are spending \$180 billion over 12 years, with a large part going to public transit. We know that this improves access to public transit and makes it easier for Canadians to get around. We believe that it will help improve the lives of Canadians and also make a difference to our environment.

When we looked into the analyses of the public transit tax credit, we noted that it was not a very effective measure. I believe that the NDP cares about the most vulnerable, as I do. The most vulnerable quite often do not pay tax, and they did not benefit from this tax credit. You have to know about it and, often, you need an accountant in order to use it. You have to know something about taxes, and not everyone does.

By investing directly in public transit, we are making it easier for everyone to access it and at the same time we are helping the environment.

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[English]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are concerned about the Asian infrastructure bank. As my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, the reality is that the government is going to invest \$500 million in an Asian infrastructure bank that is going to create jobs for building pipelines and coal-fired power plants in another part of the world. My constituents are asking why the government cannot create jobs here in Canada.

The Liberals shut down the energy east pipeline, which would have come through my riding and created jobs. Here they are, sending money outside the country instead of putting it toward good-paying middle-class jobs in my riding. They could put money into carbon capture plants, which capture 98% of greenhouse gases and 100% of sulphur and put it into the ground. This is innovation. This is advancement and a great asset for greenhouse gas capture. Why can the government not put money into Canada?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the member talked about job creation. That is clearly where we have succeeded and where the Conservatives failed for 10 years. In the last two years, we have created 600,000 jobs in this country, most of them full-time. That is something they unfortunately failed to achieve. I am all about Canada's success. I wish they had succeeded in those 10 years. They did not. They had the wrong plan.

When we look at the Asian infrastructure bank, this is part of Canada's re-engagement in the world. Most of the bank's projects are done with the support of the World Bank and other international institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank. Is the member suggesting that we should withdraw from international institutions?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address one allegation sometimes made against the Liberal government and other far left governments around the world that I think is false. Some have accused governments like these of really having it in for the rich, for wanting to get tough on people who have a lot of money, and unfairly so.

Even Winston Churchill once said, "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of Socialism is the equal sharing of miseries." I want to say that in this case, this very rare case, even the great Winston Churchill was wrong. Socialism and big government policies do not equally spread around the miseries to everyone. No, they spread them around in a way that is better described in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. They spread them around in a manner that is equal, but equal in a special way, equal in that everyone is equal, but some are more equal than others.

The Liberal government, a government that subscribes to, to put it generously, social democratic policies, socialist policies, does not disparage those who have lots of money. Rather, it has a different view of how money should be distributed. While we on this side believe in the free market, which distributes wealth based on merit, the Liberals believe that wealth should be distributed by government, that people should be allowed to get wealthy as long as they do so through the government.

In a government-directed economy, people get rich by having the best lobbyists. In a free market economy, people get ahead by having the best product or service. We have seen this borne out.

Strategas research, a company out of the United States, did a carefully calculated correlation between the money spent on lobbying in Washington and the amount of government spending in Washington. It found that as government becomes a larger share of the U.S. economy, the number of dollars companies spend on lobbying goes up almost on a one for one basis. Why? It is because business goes where the money is, and if all the money is in the government, it invests in getting that money. It invests in getting a return by purchasing political power. When the government decides who gets what, those with money buy power and then transform that power into yet more money.

What are some of the ways one can do this? One can, for example, hire a lobbyist to get a subsidy. Company X spends \$10 million on lobbying and gets a \$400-million interest-free loan, a pretty good return on investment. That is how one gets a return on investment in a government-directed economy. One purchases political power and then hopes that this political power results in more money.

In a free market economy, one invests in creating a better product or service that improves other people's lives, which they buy voluntarily with their own money, and then one gets a return by making somebody else's life better. In a free market economy based on voluntary exchange, the only way to get ahead is by offering something to someone that is worth more than it cost.

Let me give some practical examples of where our friends across the way have been extremely generous to the rich, contrary to allegations that they are hard on the rich, allegations that, in fairness and in a spirit of nonpartisanship, I seek to dispel here on the floor of the House of Commons.

First, a \$400-million interest-free loan was given to Bombardier, which, if it is ever paid back, will be done so on the most generous terms. Bombardier is controlled by a billionaire family that had 53% of the votes at a shareholder meeting, even though the family has a minority of the shares. They have multiple voting shares. That company could have raised more money by issuing more stock, but what would have happened then? The majority control of the billionaire Bombardier-Beaudoin family would have been diluted, and they would have lost their majority and thus their control of the company.

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●(1030)

The Liberals bailed out the billionaires and saved their control of that company so they could continue to make decisions and pay themselves exorbitant salaries, even when they have bad results. In fact, after the government kicked in this money, the executives of the company, some of them billionaires, paid themselves a 50% increase in compensation, all while laying off 14,000 people. We now know that many of the jobs to be created in the future are going to be south of the border, and the control of the intellectual property will be in the hands of Europeans. There was no Canadian public interest in this move, it was all about helping this billionaire family.

Therefore, it is not true, and I reject the allegation against the party opposite that it is tough on the rich. That is unfair, and I reject it, and I will stand up against those who disparage the government in that way.

Then, there is the infrastructure bank. Municipalities across the country have become smart about these construction companies. For years, these companies would come in, place a bid, promise to build a bridge or a road for a certain price, and then, after they got the contract, they would come back and say, "Oops, sorry, it's going to cost a lot more than we thought and you'll have to pay us more."

Municipalities have said that they are not doing that anymore. From now on, they are paying on a fixed price contract. It must be built for the price agreed upon and, if it goes over, the construction company will have to pay for it. That has bred discipline into the process of procurement. The government wants to take away that discipline, with loans and loan guarantees backed up by taxpayers, which will protect investors when they participate in infrastructure megaprojects. If they build a monstrous bridge, a transit project, or something else, and the project goes over budget or its revenues fall short, then that company will use the loan guarantee provided by this multi-billion dollar taxpayer-backed bank to protect them. Taxpayers get all the risk and investors get all the profit.

This whole scheme was cooked up at the Shangri-La Hotel, one of the swankiest places in Toronto. The heads of investment firms, worth literally hundreds of billions of dollars, met with ministers of this government, in secret, to craft all the terms. They decided how Canadian tax dollars would be spent. There were no consultations on this with taxpayers, the people who have to pay for it. Those who would benefit were at the table writing the policy for the government. That consultation, and the generous way with which the government carried it out, proves once again that the allegation against the government for having it in for the rich and being hard on the wealthy is absolutely false. I again dispel that false allegation.

Now we have the Asian infrastructure bank. This is a half-a-billion dollar contribution from Canadian taxpayers to a foreign bank to build infrastructure in other parts of the world. All of us at times have supported foreign aid for the world's poor, but this is not intended to help the world's poor, it is meant to help the world's rich. Wealthy investors who build pipelines—which would never get approved here in Canada—or other infrastructure in other parts of the world, would have their investments protected by \$100 billion of tax money from around the world. Therefore, if those project do not meet their financial expectations, that is fine, because taxpayers from around the world will have to pick up the tab for the incompetent

decisions of international investors. That is more welfare for the wealthy. In this case, it is the foreign wealthy, those who are not even in Canada.

We cannot say that this has anything to do with promoting trade links. In fact, the principal government participating in this Asian infrastructure bank, in China, has said that the purpose of the bank is to re-establish the Silk Road, the trading route from China westward, away from Canada. Therefore, the infrastructure that would be built could not possibly facilitate commerce with Canadians, because we are on the wrong side of the world to benefit from any of it. Again, the government has cozied up with the world's wealthy elite in order to provide taxpayer-funded benefits to those who have the most.

●(1035)

To move on to other decisions here at home, the government has decided that it is going to raise taxes. It claims it will only affect the wealthy. However, it seems that it affects everyone but the wealthy. The Fraser Institute calculated that 87% of middle-class taxpayers are paying more in tax since the government took office, on average \$800 more.

We found in the first annual financial report from Finance Canada since the government's policies were implemented that the wealthiest Canadians actually paid less in the 2016-17 tax year, because they were able to successfully move their money around and avoid the tax increases that the government imposed on people.

This brings me to the conduct and judgment of the Minister of Finance. We have learned that he was one of the individuals who moved his income in order to avoid paying the taxes that he was imposing on others. He sold his shares in Morneau Shepell on November 30, 2015, which was almost a month before his own tax increases took effect. By selling his shares at that time, he paid capital gains tax under the lower rate, rather than waiting an extra five or six weeks and paying the higher rates that he said were so fair.

Putting aside whether the minister acted ethically in that matter, on principle he should have led by example. If he believed that Canadians should pay higher taxes and that people like him should pay more, why could he not have waited five weeks to make that \$10-million sale, realize his capital gains in the 2016 year, and pay the same higher taxes that he applied to everyone else? He was very careful to make sure that those taxes would not apply to him.

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On the same point, the Minister of Finance has huffed and puffed and said it is so unfair of us to ask him questions about his shares. However, in any public company, a corporate executive could be asked those kinds of questions at a board meeting or at an annual meeting of shareholders. In fact, corporate executives are required to publicly disclose the shares they buy and sell. If they sell them at a time that is near the release of earnings report, for example, there are lots of red flags raised, and lots of questions that they are accountable for answering.

For the minister to suggest that it is somehow unreasonable for Her Majesty's loyal opposition to demand that he explain the timing of the sale of shares that he made in the immediate lead-up to the tabling of tax documents on the floor of the House of Commons is a little rich, quite literally, coming from him.

Let me talk to both the hypocrisy of his conduct and his judgment. In the corporate world, they have something called “blackouts”. Typically, officers and directors of public companies try to avoid selling shares in the immediate lead-up to the release of earnings results. Even in cases where those results are anticipated accurately, even if the guidance issued by the company at the beginning of the quarter turns out to be accurate at the end of quarter, even if all the analysts correctly predict the earnings per share that will be released at the end of the quarter, and even if there is nothing unexpected that comes out in those earning results, it is not good form for a CEO, or another executive, to sell shares a week before those results are released. It is better form for that executive to wait until three or four business days after the earning results are released, to have no doubt that everyone had exactly the same information when they sold their shares.

• (1040)

The minister admitted on the floor of the House of Commons yesterday that some of the contents of the document he tabled on December 7, 2015 were confidential, that it was kept tight within a small group in Finance Canada, that those materials were sensitive and therefore could not be shared around. If that were the case, then surely he ought not to be trading on the stock market seven or eight days before the public release of that document. He should have had the competence and the judgment to avoid the real, or perhaps just perceptual, problems that go along with that conduct. These are exactly the kinds of questions and criticisms that the opposition is expected to raise, and it would be political malpractice for us not to raise them.

Furthermore, there are places around the world where such questions are not asked of the leaders, where leaders can say, “That's out of bounds. You can't ask me that. It's none of your business.” There are places like that. They are the most miserable places to live on planet earth. I am so proud to live in a country where we have the ability to ask these kinds of questions. It is our job on this side of the House of Commons to ensure that the government is always acting in the public interest, and not in the private interest of any individual.

Going back to the point of hypocrisy, the Prime Minister and the finance minister have been crying a lot of crocodile tears about the questions they face over their own financial decisions, the amount of tax they have paid, and the way they have protected their own family fortunes.

These are the questions that they invited when, over the last three years, they have engaged in a bloody-minded campaign of class warfare. They went out and started attacking people, including in their own words, “wealthy doctors” and others, who use “fancy accounting scheme”, “a privileged few” who were avoiding “paying their fair share”. They implied that there was a group of people who were getting ahead and not paying enough, and they disparaged those people. Now the Prime Minister and the finance minister expect everyone to have sympathy for them because people are asking questions about their finances.

When they single out a group of honest, hard-working, law-abiding Canadians, and attack them for following the rules and working hard and succeeding, then people are going to ask questions as to whether they live up to their own standards. That is exactly what we have been doing.

To conclude, the government has no problem supporting the wealthy and the privileged. In fact, the government has been very, very generous to that group of people. However, we on this side of the House of Commons will continue to stand on the side of merit, free enterprise, and an economy that allows anyone who is prepared to work hard, to be smart and industrious, to get ahead while making the lives of other people better at the same time.

• (1045)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me provide some counter. The member across the way has tried to say something that is just not true. This government did in fact have a special tax increase on Canada's 1% wealthiest. There is no denying that. That is factual. In fact, the member knows it full well, because he voted against that measure.

What we have heard time and time again from members opposite is a character assassination conducted against the Minister of Finance. I found a wonderful quote that is appropriate, and I would like to read it into the record. This is what the member opposite said when he was in government:

I would encourage him, if he has the integrity, if he has the courage, to take the exact statement that he just made, walk outside in front of the media and repeat those allegations. It is my bet that he will not do it.

When we look at the character assassination, I have heard words such as “jail” and “criminal activity” being levelled against the Minister of Finance.

Would the member across the way not hold the same standard he held when he was in government, when he talked about how easy it is to use parliamentary privilege to say something inside the House, and not have the courage to say the same sorts of things outside of the House when it comes to character assassination?

• (1050)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the member just used a bunch of words that I have never used. He used the words “jail” and “criminal”, and others. I have never used such words. Never have I used such words. Never have I used such words.

The member—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am trying to hear the answer from the hon. member for Carleton, but I am hearing shouting from both sides and it is overpowering. I am very interested in what the hon. member has to say.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it is a very strange course of events when the government is using words about an allegation relating to its own minister that the opposition is not using. He almost wants us to make those allegations. We have not.

Second, the Minister of Finance told me go outside. I said, "Come with me. Let's go together. I will repeat the same facts and questions out there as I did in here", but he was like the schoolboy who challenged someone to fight and then did not show up at the bike racks. I went outside, I repeated my questions and my facts, and stated the same things out there as I did in here, which are questions and facts.

These are legitimate questions and legitimate facts, and the finance minister could have done a lot better job of dealing with these problems if he had just answered basic, simple questions, to which he would obviously have answers, like when did he sell his shares. We asked it literally dozens of times this week and as late as yesterday, he was claiming not to have any knowledge. That was an obvious question, to which he could have given an obvious answer, and he would have done himself a great service if he had. If he starts to answer questions, he will do himself a great service.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I resisted the temptation, which came to me frequently throughout the speech by the member for Carleton, to ask about relevance to Bill C-63. He did occasionally, in fairness to the member, touch on things that are actually in Bill C-63, but I am going to ask a more partisan question.

This morning, going through *The Daily Press*, those media sources that are generally cheerleaders for his party, people like Terence Corcoran and the editorialists in *The Globe and Mail*, papers and columnists who uniformly endorsed the Conservatives in the last election, are wondering if the Conservatives have not gone out too far without evidence. In this constant attack, I am not going to defend the finance minister's decisions on many things, but if the member cannot get the cheerleading choir of the Conservative Party in *The Globe and Mail* and the *Financial Post* to agree that he is on to something, would he consider changing the channel and actually talking about the bill before us?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, we will not stop asking the relevant and important questions that are the duty of an official opposition to ask. Our job is to hold the government to account to ensure that not only its policies but its conduct are appropriate. In so doing, I have stated facts, asked questions, and played my role as an opposition critic, and I will keep doing so.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on the first part of the speech by the member for Carleton. He spoke about the infrastructure bank and how all of the risk would be put on the taxpayer. If I recall, one week before the election, he announced a fund in Ottawa, which he should remember. It was called the public transit fund, which would be administered under PPP Canada. PPP Canada issues private sector funds, taxpayer

funds, and obviously the proponent of the project would issue his funds as well.

I am wondering if his mind has changed since July 27, 2015, when he announced the public transit fund, which would be administered under PPP Canada, which we know is a public-private partnership, and obviously all of the risk is on the taxpayer. He was just complaining about the infrastructure bank. All I want to know is if he has seen the enlightenment of not issuing a PPP.

• (1055)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I strongly support private sector investment in infrastructure in a way that puts the risk on the investor, and that is exactly what Conservatives did in government. We created infrastructure deals that ensured that the investor would suffer the losses in the event that the project went over budget or revenue came in below expectations. That is exactly how public-private partnerships should work. In fact, the only real benefit to having a public-private partnership is to shift risk off the taxpayer and onto the private sector investor. What, in fact, the government is doing is exactly the opposite. It is shifting the risk off the investor and onto the taxpayer, and that is what we oppose.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for another exceptional speech here in the House. I would ask him to elaborate a little on the finance minister's invitation to go out to the lobby and restate what he suggested were allegations that did not refer at all to the fact that they were facts and questions. The other half of that invitation was that if my colleague did, and he did and the finance minister did not accompany him, he would face the full weight of the law and the legal proceedings that the minister's great wealth would enable.

I wonder if my colleague could speak about the fact that the threats that have been made from the Prime Minister and the finance minister, and the legal chill that they are trying to impose on the questions that are being legitimately, logically, and democratically asked in the House.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the minister is in fact trying to use his prodigious wealth to silence his critics. There is no question about that. I have stated facts and asked questions on the floor of the House of Commons, which I have repeated outside the House. However, the minister, instead of just answering them here, has said that he wants to sue people who ask those questions.

In the House, we are equal regardless of the wealth that we inherited or brought to this place. We are all equal in our ability to conduct debate, to ask questions, and demand accountability, and that is all that we have sought from the minister. Unfortunately, he has made problems so much worse for himself through his absolute unwillingness to answer the most basic questions on the floor of the House of Commons or anywhere else. He has had all week to do it, he fails to do it, and instead he goes around using the Bay Street tactic of threatening lawsuits against anybody who disagrees with him.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Carleton has introduced a new phrase into our lexicon today: “political malpractice”. It is fascinating. He also said that the Minister of Finance is using prodigious wealth to silence people.

However, I recall that very member on the government benches day after day refusing to answer direct questions about a certain Mr. Nigel Wright, who I do think had prodigious wealth and wrote a cheque arguably to silence someone. How does he feel about that instance today?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I think a lot of people are looking back on those quaint old times in the previous government when people had to resign because they spent \$16 on a glass of orange juice, or because they, on behalf of a constituent, called a quasi-judicial body in order to try to help a constituent with a problem. Those were the days when ministers held themselves to the highest possible ethical standards. Now we live in an era where a minister can own shares secretly in a company that he regulates, introduce a bill on pensions when he owns a pension company, and where that minister can actually tell us that it is illegitimate to question his sale of shares right before introducing a tax measure. Times have changed for the worse.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

WORLD MARTIAL ARTS CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize four athletes from my riding who put in outstanding performances at the world martial arts championship in Dublin, Ireland, in October.

Representing Canada, Antoine, Félix, Kingsley, and Ruth Ann, along with their sensei, Danny Griffith, returned home with a total of 11 medals.

Ten-year-old Felix was crowned world soft kata champion, and Ruth Ann took home top honours in the 35 and over soft kata division.

All four of these karateka can be proud of their performance. They have been practising for many years with their sensei, Danny Griffith, at Danny Griffith Kenpo Karate in Ville LaSalle.

These achievements are the culmination of years of effort, work, and perseverance, and I am proud to honour them in the House today.

* * *

• (1100)

[English]

MARIJUANA

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

I want to protest an ill-thought out bill
That is passing through Parliament here on the Hill
The bill that is bad is called C-45
It has so many flaws it just shouldn't survive

Statements by Members

The Grits will allow four pot plants in each dwelling
Regardless of how bad each place will be smelling
With mould, ventilation as issues unplanned
This bill will not keep pot from our children's hands
There are more new infractions within this new rule
That our courts will be flooded, as will every school
With drug-impaired driving and challenges there
The doubling of traffic deaths and Liberals don't care
The provinces and the police in every town
Have all asked the Liberals to slow this bill down
With nearly 200 more days left til the day
Nobody but out party stands in the way
We hope that the Senate will do its true deed
And keep our great country safe from all the weed.

* * *

[Translation]

ORGANIZATIONS IN THE PONTIAC

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are right in the middle of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, an initiative that will come to a close on December 10.

All around the world, people are participating in 16 days of activities to raise awareness, share experiences, and condemn violence against women. I invite all of my constituents to participate in this initiative.

As the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6 nears, I would like to highlight the important work that organizations all over the Pontiac are doing to help women.

These include the Association des femmes immigrantes de l'Outaouais, L'EntourElle, the Table autonome des aînés des Collines, the Clinique des femmes de l'Outaouais, the Centre Mechtilde, Agir Outaouais, CALACS de la Vallée-de-la-Gatineau, the Comptoir St-Pierre de Fort-Coulouge, Maison Halte-femme Haute-Gatineau, Maison Libère-Elles, and more.

The work these groups do to help people in their communities is important, and I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart.

* * *

[English]

WORLD AIDS DAY

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks World AIDS Day. Since the virus was identified in 1984, it has proven to be one of the most destructive pandemics in history, resulting in the deaths of over 35 million people globally.

Today, we take a moment to mourn those who have been lost. While an AIDS diagnosis originally meant a death sentence, scientific research and the work of dedicated advocates, caregivers, and patients has brought a powerful message of prevention and a critical de-stigmatization of the disease.

Today, those living with HIV who have access to treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load do not transmit the virus to their sexual partners. This is a great achievement. However, it is still estimated seven Canadians are infected each day with HIV, often from the most vulnerable populations.

Statements by Members

Today, I call on the government to expand the federal initiative on HIV/AIDS, create equal access to treatment for infected Canadians, and stop the practice of banning blood donations by men who have sex with men.

* * *

[Translation]

WINTER FESTIVAL IN MADAWASKA—RESTIGOUCHE

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to tell the House about a wonderful initiative in my riding, Madawaska—Restigouche.

[English]

This year, a number of communities in East Restigouche have gotten together to plan and organize a regional winter festival. What makes this initiative so special is that Acadian, Irish, Scottish, and first nations communities are all working together to organize this event.

[Translation]

A wide range of cultural and sporting activities are planned. Under the theme “Celebrating our cultures”, musicians will warm everyone's hearts, storytellers will delight folks of all ages, and outdoor activities will thrill sports enthusiasts.

[English]

From February 1 to 4, I invite all residents of my riding to participate in this wonderful event. Of course, my honourable colleagues in this chamber are also invited.

[Translation]

Congratulations to the organizers from Balmoral, Charlo, Dalhousie, Eel River Crossing, and Eel River Bar.

Meanwhile, I want to wish all Canadians, and particularly the people of Madawaska—Restigouche, a very happy holiday season.

* * *

REGIONAL WEEKLY PUBLICATIONS

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government needs to respect Canadians living in the regions whose community life and day-to-day reality are different from that of people who live in large urban centres.

In light of the rapid advances in information technology and in the deployment of high-speed digital technologies, regional media needs to adapt to the market reality. Funding programs exist for various media, but not for print media, even though print media newsrooms produce so much of the real news.

In this era of fake news, it is important to have access to the truth. The right to information is critical to all Canadians. For instance, my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier has the weekly *Courrier de Portneuf*, a co-operative that is currently in a precarious situation. They have to do a lot more with a lot less.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage needs to take this problem seriously, have the decency to meet with representatives of the Fédération nationale des communications, and come up with a solution to ensure the survival of regional weekly publications.

People living in the regions deserve respect. They, too, have a right to their news.

* * *

●(1105)

[English]

CAPE BRETON REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to commend the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation, and all those who supported the annual Cape Breton Regional Hospital fundraisers.

On November 18, the Festival of the Greens raised \$120,000 for Operation Heart. Because of these amazing donations, the hospital will have a new anaesthesia machine to ensure incredible results in all 11,000 surgical procedures that take place in the hospital every year. In addition to this fundraiser, a record-breaking \$1,016,000 was fundraised in partnership with local radio stations on October 5, at the annual RadioDay event.

The contributions of Cape Bretoners to this cause go toward vital parts of the hospital: the Cape Breton Cancer Centre, which treats 150 to 200 patients a day; the neonatal intensive care unit, which takes care of the little ones; the pediatrics unit; the mental health services; and so much more.

I commend all the volunteers, organizers, businesses, and donors who make these events such a great success and who do so much for our community.

* * *

CANADA 150 CONSTITUENCY AWARDS

Ms. Kim Rudd (Northumberland—Peterborough South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the recipients of the Canada 150 Constituency Awards in my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South, all of whom represent “community heroism”.

Some of them have been quietly doing good work for decades. Through their acts of generosity and selflessness, our towns and villages are better places to live. We have one young woman who has helped with the accessibility of health care and social services in Tanzania. We have another who quietly makes sure that those who are hungry have warm soup, fresh sandwiches, and a kind smile. We have a young indigenous youth who uses his music to raise funds and awareness for the causes he believes in, whether here or in the farthest north.

These are but three recipients. Many have never been honoured publicly for their contributions. I am glad that these awards will mark a permanent testament to their efforts and their undeniable positive effects on so many.

*Statements by Members***UNIONVILLE OLDE TYME CHRISTMAS PARADE**

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to wish Markham—Unionville residents and their families a very merry Christmas. Tonight I will be attending the 37th Unionville Olde Tyme Christmas Parade down Main Street in Unionville. I am excited to join my team once again to see thousands of residents get together in the spirit of Christmas. Once again they will be accepting unwrapped toys to be donated to the toy mountain for those who are less privileged this Christmas.

I want to give a special thanks to the Rotary Club and the Unionville BIA for organizing this parade again. As well, I thank the many community volunteers who helped me to organize my float and who will take part in the parade tonight. I cannot wait to get there and celebrate with them.

Merry Christmas and happy holidays. Ho, ho, ho.

* * *

FORMER MEMBER FOR GANDER-TWILLINGATE

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand to honour someone who stood in this great House for nearly 30 years, and then in our Senate for another 15 years. He is the longest continually serving member of this Parliament. I speak of former member of Parliament, former minister, former senator and, most importantly, a ferociously proud Newfoundlander, the Hon. George Baker.

Born in Green's Harbour, he spent most of his life in Gander with his wife Averill and his family. George Baker had a solid reputation for always speaking up and supporting his constituents. For eight federal elections in a row, his constituents returned the favour and supported him. He took on giants, such as John Crosbie and Brian Mulroney, and at times took issue with his own side by taking on former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

Recently retired from the Senate, not surprisingly he now lives in Gander.

George Baker leaves these hallways with some advice for all of us, when he said, "You do your best. You represent your constituents the best you can". I thank George.

* * *

•(1110)

FRANK PHILBROOK

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to remember a former member of Parliament for my riding, Dr. Frank Philbrook. Frank served in the 30th Parliament of Canada from 1974 to 1979, under the right hon. Pierre Trudeau. He was wholeheartedly devoted to serving the residents of Oakville and Halton and used his experience as a physician both in Canada and abroad to serve Canadians.

Having served on many parliamentary committees, including external affairs and national defence; justice and legal affairs; and health, welfare and social affairs, it is clear that Frank was a hard-working and dedicated member of this place. Frank was the beloved husband of Midge for 62 years, father of three daughters, and grandfather to five.

I would like to thank Frank for his service to Oakville, this place, and to all Canadians. My thoughts are with his loved ones. Rest in peace, Frank.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to stand up for the thousands of Canadians who suffer from disabilities or life-threatening illnesses. Every day they gather their courage to get out of bed, go to work, take care of their families, and do the best they can in very challenging circumstances. We know that for some unknown reason, the Canada Revenue Agency has decided to go after these individuals and take away their right to claim the disability tax credit. We heard from witnesses at the finance committee how the Canada Revenue Agency decided on a whim to deny their claims and put persons with disabilities at risk of losing funds already built up in their registered disability savings plans.

As members of Parliament, we are here to stand up for our constituents and put their interests first and foremost. We are here to fight for their rights and to be the voice of those who often go unheard. I urge the government to stop its delaying tactics, stop the excuses, and fix this injustice once and for all.

* * *

OTTAWA SOUTH

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, things are really cooking in my riding of Ottawa South. Last week, I had the privilege of joining my municipal colleagues to open Ottawa's first-ever community kitchen at the Albion-Heatherington recreation centre. The kitchen is traditionally the heart of a home, but this kitchen will become the heart of the community.

Canada's 150th birthday is a terrific time to celebrate the places across the country that unite and connect us. I was delighted to announce our government's contribution of \$176,000 through the Canada 150 community infrastructure program. This state-of-the-art kitchen will bring neighbours together to learn new cooking skills, understand the importance of healthy eating, and will help foster community engagement.

Congratulations to everyone involved in this very worthwhile project.

* * *

WORLD AIDS DAY

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on World AIDS Day, I am proud to highlight the incredible work of AIDS Saskatoon and to thank Jason Mercredi and his caring, hard-working staff for being leaders in HIV prevention, awareness, and support.

Oral Questions

Saskatchewan has the highest rate of HIV in Canada, almost three times the national average, and almost half of all new cases are in Saskatoon. Stable housing means that people in my community living with HIV can stay on their medications, resulting in an almost a zero per cent transmission rate. Research shows that 75% of homeless individuals living with HIV and no support will die within five years.

A national plan to prevent and end homelessness addressing the unique needs of those living with HIV would help turn the tide, not just in my community, but across Canada. I ask all members to support my motion, Motion No. 147. Together, we can plan to end homelessness.

* * *

• (1115)

MOVEMBER

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Confucius once said, “A man without a mustache is a man without a soul”. He would know, having sported an outstanding 'stache of his own. I am here today to show the House my attempt at this year's Movember campaign.

The theme of the 2017 campaign was “A life without the men we love”. Unfortunately for many, this can become a reality, as one in two men will be diagnosed with some form of cancer in his lifetime and one in seven men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer specifically.

While Movember started as a way to increase awareness about prostate cancer, it has expanded its scope to include all men's health issues, including mental health and suicide prevention, which are as important as our physical health.

I want to thank all members of the House who grew a mustache of their own, and congratulations to those who donated to this great cause so that we can raise awareness about men's health issues, all while having a bit of fun.

I want to thank all Canadians, and especially Team MOPO Estevan.

Grow Your Mo.

* * *

[Translation]

OLD AYLMEER CHRISTMAS MARKET

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the wonderful Old Aylmer Christmas market will open tomorrow and the Aylmer Christmas parade will be held tomorrow evening.

[English]

For more than 20 years, these annual events have served both as a celebration of the holiday season and a time to recognize the contributions of community groups in Aylmer. More than 30,000 people attend the Santa Claus parade each year.

[Translation]

Every year, the organizers work tirelessly to recruit hundreds of volunteers and to ensure that the parade is a success .

I would like to thank the entire organizing committee. Year after year, it ensures the success of the parade and brings the spirit of the season to the community. Hurray for the Christmas market. Hurray for the Christmas parade. Hurray for Hull—Aylmer, which is alive with the magic of Christmas.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, public companies have something called a blackout period on the sale of shares by officers and directors. Those decision makers are forbidden from selling shares in their own company in the immediate lead up to quarterly earnings result, even when analysts, or even the company itself, have widely and accurately predicted what those results will be.

In light of that corporate standard, which the minister should know, would it not have been more appropriate for him to wait until after the introduction of his tax measures before he sold his shares in Morneau Shepell?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to remind the member what the tax measure in question is. It is something we announced during the campaign, that we campaigned on for 78 days, thanks to the previous government's never-ending campaign. We said that we would raise taxes on the personal income of the wealthiest 1% and reduce it for nine million Canadians. This was the least best kept secret in town. We told the media. We told Canadians we would come back in December to do just that.

If the member opposite would care to read his own local newspaper, in the *Ottawa Citizen*, on November 6, 2015, we said that our priority was to get the tax reduction in place as quickly as possible, adding that the government's goal—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, and the platform the Liberals put out said that the tax measure would come in place April 1, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

Nothing is certain until it is actually tabled on the floor of the House of Commons. However, even if it were widely predicted, when corporate earnings are widely predicted, and even forecasted by the company itself, the leaders of those companies, officers and directors, are forbidden from selling shares in the immediate lead up to the release of those formal documents. That is a basic corporate standard.

All I am asking is why the minister would not hold himself to that same standard in this office.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will finish, because I was cut off. In the November 6, 2015, *Ottawa Citizen* article, we said that our objective was to have the middle class tax cut in place for January 1.

Oral Questions

There has never been any secret in our plan to tax the wealthiest 1% and reduce taxes for the middle class. The accusations opposition members are trying to make are completely baseless. The fact that they do not dare repeat them outside the House shows, with great certainty, that they have nothing to back them up.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about this famous tax policy. The minister made sure to sell his shares before his tax increases took effect so he would not have to pay any of the taxes he was imposing on others.

However, who is paying more now? People suffering with diabetes. Now we learn that people suffering with autism are losing the disability tax credit, a tax increase of \$1,500 for families that are suffering with great hardship. Whenever Liberals raise taxes, why do they always target those with the least?

• (1120)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government pledged that the agency would administer measures for persons with disabilities in a fair, transparent, and accessible way.

I was proud to announce that the disability advisory committee, which was disbanded by the former Conservative government in 2006, was being reinstated. By reinstating the committee, the agency will benefit from its advice about enhancing the quality and accessibility of the services it provides to persons with disabilities and their families.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is sad that today, and for the past few days, we have had to ask the Minister of Finance the same question without getting an answer.

We expect that a minister who manages public finances should be able to answer specific and simple questions. We have repeatedly asked the same question. We have the right to ask it, since the minister's behaviour has raised huge ethical problems.

In light of these ethical problems, why is the finance minister unable to answer our questions and why does he not resign?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not see a question in the member's comments. He should repeat his question because there was no question in what he just said.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is simple. We are calling for the resignation of the country's chief financial officer, given that he has lost our confidence.

The Minister of Finance is caught up in conflicts of interest. He forgot to declare his villa in Europe and he made transactions that will affect his own portfolio. With his Bay Street background, he should know the rules for these transactions.

Here, we are held to the highest ethical standards, and he is not living up to them. He is in a conflict of interest. He does not even consult Canadians about his measures—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question from the member for Beauce is a perfect example of the Conservatives's tactics. They are conflating a bunch of different issues and making false, baseless accusations.

If the member wants to know whether I have confidence in the Minister of Finance and whether we have confidence in the Minister of Finance, he need only look to the job numbers posted just today, which show that we have created 600,000 jobs in the past two years. That is more than the Conservatives ever managed to do. Yes, the Minister of Finance has our full confidence.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has set a new record for unfilled appointments, including the appointments of parliamentary watchdogs. Yesterday, the Liberals released the names of their picks for the positions of official languages and lobbying commissioner. Once again, they failed to consult the opposition.

Our parliamentary leader requested the list of candidates so we could engage in something called “real consultation”. Will the government share the list of candidates for both appointments with the opposition, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to official languages in general as well as bilingualism, it goes without saying that the NDP has lost all credibility. The NDP is now trying to undermine the credibility of the new Commissioner of Official Languages.

I do not really understand where my colleague is coming from. I consulted the NDP critic last summer and he replied with a letter. Last week, I had another opportunity to talk with him. He made three requests: ensure that we consult the various official languages organizations, which we did; consult the opposition leaders, which we did; and appoint a candidate from Acadia, which we did.

We fulfilled all three requests and we have an excellent candidate in Raymond Théberge.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. We are talking about consultation. We want the government to work with the opposition.

It seems to me that the government learned nothing from the Madeleine Meilleur fiasco. The appointment of officers of Parliament who work for every member of the House should be done in consultation with the opposition, in other words through real consultation with the recognized parties in the House.

Oral Questions

I will repeat my simple question. Will the government share the list of members of the selection committee and the people on the list of finalists, yes or no?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we consulted the leaders of the recognized parties on the matter of appointments, including the appointment of the lobbying commissioner. Once her appointment is approved by Parliament, Ms. Bélanger will have a seven-year term.

We welcome all ideas, proposals, and people from all parties in this process, which is truly open and transparent, something we are proud of.

* * *

• (1125)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this would have been a lot less complicated if we had adopted the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley's motion for a real appointment process for officers.

On another topic, yesterday, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security met with the Minister of Public Safety only for one hour on a 138-page omnibus bill, Bill C-59.

We cannot fast-track issues relating to our national security, rights and freedoms, and the privacy of Canadians. Spending one hour with the minister and two hours with heads of agencies is simply not enough.

Can the minister commit to come before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, and once again answer members' questions on this omnibus bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, never before have Canadians been so engaged on the issue of national security. In fact, the broadest consultations in Canadian history happened on Bill C-59.

I want to thank the member opposite and the committee as well for their months of work in the study of the national security intelligence framework. The minister was able to point directly to the work of the committee and how it influenced the creation of that bill. This is an excellent example of not only profound and deep national consultation, but the committee working excellently together. Because the bill has been moved at first reading, I look forward to working with the member in a very open way to make sure we—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Beloil—Chambly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's compliments, but we are talking about the minister appearing for one hour on a 138 page bill, which, by the government's own admission, is the biggest overhaul of pieces of legislation in 30 years. If the Liberals think that is sufficient, then they do not understand what they are doing. It just does not work.

This is in a context where we are hearing more and more about some of CSIS's questionable spying practices, with the use of things like stingray technologies. There are still many questions about a too low threshold for information sharing in the current legislation. There are issues around new powers for CSE, a whole slew of questions that we have not even had a chance to ask.

In its new legislation, when will the government finally take Canadians—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the changes we have tabled are not only comprehensive but are recognized as really being on the vanguard in leading the world on the issue of bringing our protection of Canadians, both their security and their rights, to bear. We are at the beginning of this process.

The member knows I am at the committee every day. I am at his disposal to answer his questions any day of the week. The committee proceedings are following detailed work that was done on the security and intelligence framework, and the most exhaustive consultations that happened on a national basis. I look forward to continuing the conversation.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first duty of the opposition is to ask questions about the facts, which we are doing. The first duty of the government is to answer, which it is not doing.

We have asked the Minister of Finance dozens of times over a period of more than a week now whether he was the person who sold 680,000 Morneau Shepell shares valued at about \$10 million one week before his tax policy was introduced in 2015. Not once did we get even a hint of a specific answer.

Could the Minister of Finance finally stand up and come clean with Canadians? That is what they want.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member was listening to the Minister of Finance this week, because the minister repeatedly said that he sold these shares that November and December, after coming to Ottawa, and that he even gave nearly \$5 million to charity.

Yes, the opposition's role is to ask questions and hold the government to account, but that does not include making personal attacks, which regrettably is what we heard in the House this week. There was not a hint of insider trading in the transaction that was carried out. No need to take my word for it, however.

[*English*]

This was in a *CBC News* column this morning, "To be clear: there is zero actual evidence that [the finance minister] engaged in insider trading."

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the parliamentary secretary to quote the finance minister's exact answer when he confirmed whether it was his shares that he sold on November 30, 2015. This was a very clear and specific question, and the minister has never given me anything close to a real answer.

Could the Minister of Finance finally rise and give Canadians a clear answer? We have asked him about 75 questions. Could he finally give us an answer?

Was he the one who sold the 680,000 shares? We are not talking about buying a pair of socks. We are talking about 10 million dollars' worth of shares.

• (1130)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been clear. He sold some shares that November and December. He was very clear about that. Why is this worth talking about? That is the question.

Could the member tell me how that could have made any difference? We are talking about a clear tax measure, one that was public knowledge. It was no secret that we said we were coming back to Ottawa to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lower them for the middle class. How could that have had any sort of impact on the stock market or on one particular stock? I would like him to tell me that.

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the finance minister has not told us much, he has said that he gave direction to sell some shares in his family company when he came into office. He said he did not remember exactly when, just like he did not remember he owned a company in France. These non-answers simply raise more questions.

Why did the finance minister not take the opportunity to sell all of his shares in Morneau Shepell when he was first elected instead of hiding them in a numbered company in Alberta?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to understand the line of reasoning. The Conservatives are saying that he should have sold all of his shares, or he should not have sold all of his shares.

The fact is that what I see from this week on the part of opposition members is that they want to talk about anything else but the economy. On that front, the finance minister has delivered for Canadians more than the Conservatives ever could in the 10 years they were in power. We have 600,000 jobs created, with most of them full-time; the fastest growth in the G7; and the unemployment rate is the lowest in a decade. This is the finance minister's record.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have learned is that the Minister of Finance is quite forgetful. He forgot to disclose the company that held his French villa. He forgot to ask the Ethics Commissioner for clearance to introduce Bill C-27. He cannot seem to recall when he sold 680,000 shares in Morneau Shepell.

Perhaps he will remember this. Before he made his late November 2015 sale of those 680,000 shares, did the minister clear it with the Ethics Commissioner first?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives forgot, for 10 years, to grow the economy and to take care of the middle class. That is something the finance minister has done remarkably well in the last two years, creating 600,000 jobs and growing our economy at the fastest pace in the G7.

I understand why the Conservatives do not want to talk about it. They focus on the finance minister, making all sorts of false and baseless accusations they would not dare repeat outside.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has been asked directly, many times, if he was the one who sold 680,000 shares of Morneau Shepell stock on November 30, 2015. He said that he gave instructions to sell some stock when he was elected 42 days earlier but says he does not know, or will not say, when the sale happened.

The minister seems to have a hard time recalling specifics about his assets, like forgetting that he owned a French company for two years. I will make it easy. Can the minister confirm if the number of shares he gave instructions to sell was in fact 680,000?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has said time and time again in this House that he sold shares when he took office, when he arrived in Ottawa, and that he has always worked, as well, with the Ethics Commissioner to make sure that all the rules are followed. He followed her recommendations to the letter when she said to put in place a conflict of interest screen. That is what he has done.

The finance minister has been working for the last two years to grow this economy, to create jobs for Canadians, and to reduce inequalities, and he has done it remarkably well.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been multiple issues with the finance minister: not having his assets in a blind trust after he said he did and would; controlling assets in numbered companies; not declaring a French corporation; introducing Bill C-27, for which he is now under investigation, a pension change that could directly affect his company; and now, this share issue.

Why can the finance minister not see how Canadians find it hard to trust him after he has broken their trust?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the 600,000 Canadians who have gotten jobs over the last two years as a result of the work of this government, of this finance minister, who has created the conditions for prosperity for all in this country, would have the utmost confidence in the finance minister.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil would like to hear the answer to his question. I just want to remind the hon. members not to shout across the floor when someone is answering or asking a question.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has, I believe, another 22 seconds.

• (1135)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I would also think that the some 20,000 children in my riding whose families receive more money through the Canada child benefit, which has lifted 300,000 kids out of poverty, would have the utmost confidence in the finance minister. He is taking care of the real needs of Canadians, while the opposition is playing politics, as it always does.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' Bill S-3 proposal does not end discrimination in the Indian Act, does not help all women, and should not be subject to consultation.

Indigenous women have been loud and clear. Discrimination should end for all indigenous women. Although Bill S-3 meets some of the court's order, it fails to bring justice for all indigenous women. Liberals promised that they would be better. They promised a real nation-to-nation relationship.

Does the minister concede that this bill fails to end gender discrimination for all indigenous women?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that our government is very committed to working with first nations, parliamentarians, and all those individuals who have been impacted by the discriminatory factors and clauses in the Indian Act.

We are making historic amendments to this bill today, and we are remedying all sex-based inequities that have existed going back to 1869. Those that existed prior to 1951 will come into force immediately. Those extending beyond—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Saskatoon West.

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HEALTH

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first nations women should not have to wait for their human rights.

Today is World AIDS Day, and for a year, doctors in my home province have urged the Liberals to declare a public health state of emergency, as Saskatchewan has the highest rate of HIV in Canada. Seventy-nine percent of those newly diagnosed are indigenous peoples, and with the closure of STC, many have difficulty accessing medical services.

Community groups have said that they cannot wait for the government to act. They need solutions now. Will the government support their efforts to address the HIV crisis in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Don Rusnak (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is deeply committed to addressing HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C in Canada, including in first nations communities in Saskatchewan. Budget 2017 included initial investments of \$37.5 million over five years to support the prevention and control of HIV and hepatitis C among first nation and Inuit communities.

In collaboration with first nations leadership and the province of Saskatchewan, we have supported a growing number of "know your status" initiatives, which have been very effective in increasing access to testing, follow-up, and treatment. We will continue working in partnership with first nations leadership in Saskatchewan communities and the province to prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Lakeland.

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ETHICS

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, *Global National* reports that the finance minister's father, and company founder, sold 100,000 Morneau Shepell shares each on November 23 and December 3, 2015. Someone sold 680,000 Morneau Shepell shares on November 30. On December 7, the finance minister tabled tax changes, the details of which had been confidential. Morneau Shepell shares immediately dropped by 5%. Taxes went up, so the sales earned a maximum value.

Yesterday, in question period, the minister still said that he does not know when he sold his shares. How is that possible?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has said that he sold some shares when he arrived in Ottawa. That was during that period of November and December.

I fail to understand the line of reasoning from the opposition. It is important to understand how the stock market works. I will just quote:

BMO chief economist Doug Porter said... already-low oil prices dropped "heavily" that day [December 7]— by five per cent. He said that factor alone may have been responsible for much of the weakness in the market

There are many factors influencing the stock market. It is very hard to fathom that a public policy that had been public, that we said we would come to Ottawa to do, to raise taxes on personal income for the wealthiest 1%, would have an impact on any given stock.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance said that the sale of 680,000 shares in Morneau Shepell days before he announced tax changes, a sale that saved him a cool half-million, had nothing to do with the tax changes and everything to do with divesting himself prior to being sworn in as minister. The sale was really about divestment.

Can the minister explain why he held one million shares in Morneau Shepell until one month ago?

• (1140)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has always been clear that he sold some shares, and has never denied it, when he took office in Ottawa. The shares of Morneau Shepell have gone up since that day. I fail to understand the reasoning of the opposition member.

Let me be clear that the tax measures we introduced in 2015 were to raise personal income taxes for the wealthiest 1%. It was something we promised. It was something we campaigned on. I am very proud that we moved on that important commitment and lowered taxes for nine million Canadians.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday *Global National* reported that the finance minister's father sold 200,000 shares of Morneau Shepell stock days before his son announced tax changes on December 7. The finance minister also admits that he sold some shares before he announced those very same tax measures.

We know that the finance minister did not hold his stock in a blind trust, so he had direct control of his shares. Did the finance minister ask the Ethics Commissioner for permission to sell those shares?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we think that the opposition could not go any lower, it does. Now it is trying to implicate the finance minister's father, and I think that is disgraceful.

The *Financial Post* this morning stated that the attacks by the Tories are becoming unethical in and of themselves. I think the opposition can do better than that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had it up to here with this government and its supreme arrogance toward elected members of the House.

We were elected to stand up for Canadians. We are here to ask questions on behalf of taxpayers. That is our responsibility. Never again will we let the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance bully us and refuse to answer questions.

Will the minister wait until a commission of inquiry finds out what he did, or will he do the only honourable thing he can at this point and resign?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the utmost respect for the opposition member, who is from my region. Yes, the opposition's job is to ask questions, to ask the government tough questions, but it is not the opposition's job to engage in personal attacks that have no basis in fact. That is what we have been seeing all week. I find that disgraceful, and I think the opposition can do much better.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we recently obtained an internal Department of Justice report that the

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government has been hiding since March of this year. Why? Because it is damning.

Between 2008 and 2018, the government diverted over \$40 million from the Contraventions Act fund. That money was supposed to have been invested to improve access to justice in both official languages, but it was spent elsewhere. Organizations have been closing their doors for lack of funding.

Will the government commit to spending the money where it promised to spend it?

[English]

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally reject the notion that the Department of Justice has hidden any report. We have been transparent in all manner of appointments and all manner of providing support to legal aid clinics. As a matter of fact, this government has topped up legal aid clinics, enhancing access to justice, in particular for victims. We are very proud of that work, and we will continue to do it.

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SCIENCE

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at committee, I asked the science minister to explain the mysterious case of disappearing federal scientists, but I did not get a full answer. According to Statistics Canada, in 2012, during the worst year of Stephen Harper's war on science, the federal government employed 37,000 scientists and researchers. This number dropped to 35,500 when the Liberals took power, but under this minister, the Liberals employ only 34,500 researchers, 1,000 fewer than when they took office. Where did they go?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a decade of darkness, the federal government is rebuilding its science capacity. Last year we invested in our people and started hiring more than 135 new scientists for DFO alone. This year, budget 2017 is investing \$60 million in the National Research Council, the crown jewel of the federal research system. We are also investing in new spaces for researchers, including \$80 million for new plant health research in Sidney, B.C.

* * *

• (1145)

HEALTH

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand in recognition of World AIDS Day, a day whereby we can all work together to reduce the stigma of this tragic illness and provide support to those affected by it.

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Can the Minister of Health please inform this House about what actions our government is taking to address HIV and AIDS in Canada?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for this important question and for his important advocacy on this issue.

World AIDS Day is a reminder that HIV/AIDS remains a persistent health issue around the world, and our government is deeply committed to addressing it. This morning, I was pleased to announce \$26.4 million in investments for 84 projects, involving 122 organizations, and almost \$10 million for five research projects. These projects will help reduce stigma and prevent HIV, hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne diseases.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I asked him about his decision to remove listing female genital mutilation as a crime from Canada's citizenship guide, the Prime Minister said he scolded the Liberian government. However, reports obtained by *Global News* show that the Canada Border Services Agency has been on the alert for the arrival in Canada of practitioners of FGM for more than a year.

I ask again. Knowing this, will the Prime Minister reverse his decision to delete listing FGM as a crime from Canada's citizenship guide?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, female genital mutilation is an abhorrent and unacceptable practice, and it is against the law. Canada has and will continue to make efforts to prevent and address FGM, and through our gender-based violence strategy, front-line service providers will have the resources to better respond to the needs of survivors of gender-based violence, including survivors of female genital mutilation. Our government will always defend and promote women's and girls' rights at home and globally.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): No answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Toronto *Star* has reported that government documents show that Canadian girls are being taken abroad to undergo female genital mutilation. This report also noted that Canada is lagging far behind other developed countries in efforts to prevent this from happening. Part of combatting this prevention needs to be arming women with knowledge of their rights, especially those who are new to Canada.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his decision to delete listing FGM as a crime from Canada's citizenship guide?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government committed to completely revamping the Conservatives' citizenship guide because it did not accurately and completely represent Canadians.

The minister is holding broader consultations with a wider range of stakeholders, including national indigenous organizations and

experts on the subject. The new guide will better represent Canadian diversity and groups that were under-represented, such as women, the LGBTQ community, francophone communities, and first nations.

I should mention that the guide is still being developed. We will analyze all the comments we have received so far to ensure that we are making informed decisions.

* * *

[*English*]**TAXATION**

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Larry and Diana Badke had 64 acres of their property in the Cariboo destroyed by B.C. wildfires. When the Prime Minister came out, they believed him when he pledged to stay with them every step of the way. They need an answer. They have been waiting for weeks. Will property owners who must salvage burnt timber be charged capital gains, in spite of the enormous cost of the repairs to their property? They have been waiting, we have been asking.

Will the minister stand up and tell us today if she is going to charge them capital gains on the salvage of timber?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the Canadians affected by wildfires, especially in British Columbia, are facing challenges.

The Canada Revenue Agency is committed to helping them and easing their burden. The agency provides taxpayer relief in the event of natural disasters such as the B.C. wildfires. Every application for taxpayer relief is examined on a case-by-case basis.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not an answer.

In July, the Prime Minister swept into my riding and pledged to help every family impacted by the B.C. wildfires. However, once the cameras were gone, his government has been unwilling and unable to answer a simple question. We have been trying to get an answer from the revenue minister for weeks.

I have a simple question. Will private property owners who have lost everything and now must salvage the timber off of their property be faced with capital gains taxes, yes or no?

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

● (1150)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that Canadians affected by wildfires, especially in British Columbia, are facing challenges. The Canada Revenue Agency is committed to providing taxpayer relief in the event of natural disasters, such as the B.C. wildfires. Every application for taxpayer relief is examined individually.

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CANADA POST

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates tabled the report entitled "The Way Forward for Canada Post" more than a year ago. The government pledged to unveil its vision for the future of our postal service by the end of 2017. We are still waiting. It is now December 1, and there are only two weeks left in the session.

Can the minister promise that she will table her vision before the end of the parliamentary session?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has kept its promise to continue the moratorium on the switch to community mailboxes across the country. Two important reports have been prepared.

We thank the parliamentary committee and the special task force established to study Canada Post policies for their hard work.

The minister has indicated many times that we will provide our decision on Canada Post policy by the end of the year.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the latest census is discouraging. It shows a persistent gender-based wage gap in Canada. On average, women with a bachelor's degree earn \$13,740 less annually than men with the same level of education. That is \$13,740.

An NDP motion on pay equity was adopted in the House almost a year ago and the government has yet to do anything about it.

When will the government acknowledge pay equity as a right and rectify this injustice?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great day for jobs and employment in Canada. Canadians have created over 600,000 jobs since we have taken office, almost 80,000 this month alone.

However, the gender wage gap, as my colleague notes, remains high, which is why we are showing leadership to address this aspect. Equal pay for work of equal value, pay equity, is a critical component. Our consultations on how to do this are over, and we will be introducing proactive pay equity legislation in 2018.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has now been 253 days since the finance minister rejected the Canadian autism partnership, and it is very clear that the government has no idea how it is going to replace it. This broad partnership would have worked with autism organizations and governments across the country, providing expert advice on issues facing people with autism, issues exactly like the serious one raised by Autism Canada in regard to the disability tax credit.

Families are using words like "frustrating", "maddening", and "heartbreaking" to describe the situation, but most of all what they want to know is what the government is doing to fix this.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that autism spectrum disorder has a significant impact on families and individuals. Federal investments in research, data improvement, surveillance, and training skills are supporting those with autism and their families. There is an extraordinary network of stakeholders across the country raising awareness and providing services to families. Our government will continue to support these efforts through our programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, communication problems abound at the office of the minister responsible for the Canada Revenue Agency.

Several organizations that advocate for the well-being of persons with disabilities want to talk to the minister. Autism Canada recently sent a letter requesting a conversation with the minister.

Can the Minister of National Revenue confirm when she plans to meet with the representatives of Autism Canada?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform my colleague that I met with the representatives of Autism Canada this week.

[English]

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families with children who have autism need the disability tax credit to help offset the costs of expensive therapy. The Liberals are nickel and diming these families to pay for their out-of-control spending. It is a disgusting attack on vulnerable Canadians. Do these families not have enough to deal with without having to fight the Liberals to get the credits that they need?

Oral Questions

●(1155)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, we proudly announced that we are reinstating the agency's Disability Advisory Committee, which was abolished by the Conservative government in 2006.

We recognize that autism spectrum disorder has a significant and lifelong impact on individuals and their families. Federal investments in research, improved data, surveillance, and training will help support people with autism and their families.

There is an extraordinary network of stakeholders across the country, raising awareness and providing services to families. Our government will continue to support their efforts through our programs.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Prime Minister stood in the House and addressed past wrongs done to the LGBTQ2 community, acknowledging and apologizing for this dark chapter in our history.

[Translation]

At the same time, the Prime Minister acknowledged that there was still work to do, in particular with respect to the over-criminalization of HIV non-disclosure.

[English]

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General tell the House about actions being taken to address this serious issue?

[Translation]

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for West Nova for his question and his excellent work.

We all have a duty to work on reducing the discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV.

[English]

Today, on World AIDS Day, the Minister of Justice released a report addressing over-criminalization within the HIV community, which can discourage testing and treatment, and ultimately increase rates of infection. By treating HIV first and foremost as a public health issue, and by tailoring the use of the criminal law, we will improve the health of our citizens while maintaining the safety of our communities.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, workers in my riding who go to work every day at the Davie shipyard are extremely proud to

have delivered the supply ship *Asterix* to the Royal Canadian Navy on time, on budget, and at the lowest price.

A second ship urgently needs to be built in order to meet the navy's operational needs, but the Liberals are standing in the way.

Will the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Procurement go to Lévis this Sunday to explain to the workers how they plan to use a single ship to resupply a navy fleet that patrols three oceans?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the national shipbuilding strategy provides opportunities for shipyards across the country.

We are very proud of the work accomplished by the men and women of the Davie shipyard. We are very proud of the ship we are about to receive. I saw yesterday that Conservative members have visited the Davie shipyard. However, they were not there the day they released a shipbuilding strategy that left Davie out in the cold. We are working very hard to include Davie in our national shipbuilding strategy.

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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of our democracy. An important principle of that democracy is that everyone has an equal opportunity to run for office.

[English]

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions update this House on the government's response to the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta ruling on the \$1,000 deposit for federal election candidates?

[Translation]

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier for her question and for the good work that she does.

[English]

We believe in a vibrant and inclusive democratic process in which more Canadians, not fewer, should be able to participate. We are committed to improving our democratic institutions and restoring Canadians' trust and participation in our democracy. Therefore, we will not be appealing the recent ruling in Alberta. We acknowledge the Elections Canada decision to apply the Alberta ruling across the country so that we can have one set of rules for all Canadians. Prospective candidates will no longer be required to pay a \$1,000 deposit as part of their nomination process.

I look forward to working with all members to strengthen, protect, and improve our democracy.

JUSTICE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year, hundreds of Canadian women are caught up in the vicious cycle of sex trafficking, yet since coming into power, the Liberals have allowed the fight against human trafficking to languish. They have allowed the national action plan to combat human trafficking to expire. They have ended federal funding to NGOs, obstructed important tools for police that were adopted by this House, and have introduced legislation to block consecutive sentencing for sex traffickers.

When will the Liberal government step up and start fighting this horrific form of modern-day slavery?

• (1200)

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, human trafficking is abhorrent, and we must do everything within our power to stop it. That is why we work with our domestic and international partners to protect victims and to ensure we do everything we can to stop this practice. Recently, we introduced Bill C-38 to give police and prosecutors new tools to investigate and prosecute human trafficking offences. We have also introduced Bill C-21, which gives important tools to combat cross-border crimes.

I look forward to working with the member on this important issue.

* * *

[Translation]

MEDIA INDUSTRY

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage considers newspapers to be obsolete. If she cannot read it on a tablet, then it has outlived its usefulness.

At a time when sources of information are multiplying, the minister is taking some away. Quality information is essential to a healthy democracy. We have a duty to support it.

Will the minister listen to the journalistic community and institute a program or funding to support national and regional print newspapers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to send my colleague the speech that I gave at the end of September in either print or digital format.

In that speech, I clearly stated that we are going to continue to support our local media and help them through this difficult transition so that we can retain our journalists and maintain jobs in this field across the country.

We know that journalism lies at the heart of our democracy. As a government, we believe in the importance of print media, whether it is in paper or digital format.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Leony Pavithra Lawrence is a perfect example of a refugee who has

Oral Questions

adjusted well to life in Quebec and makes Quebec even stronger, but the government wants to deport her and her entire family.

The school board is calling on the government to reverse its decision. The opposition in Quebec City, much like the opposition here, is calling on the government to reverse its decision.

The Government of Quebec, with the support of Quebec society as a whole, says it wants to find a way to keep the Lawrence family in Quebec. They will be deported on Sunday if no action is taken immediately.

Will the government reverse its decision?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the concerns of the member opposite.

As members know, pursuant to Canadian privacy laws, we cannot discuss individual cases. Every case is unique and is assessed on its own merit.

In accordance with Canadian law, our government is committed to submitting each case to IRCC where it will be assessed fairly and based on merit. All applicants can expect fair and impartial treatment.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Lawrence family is scheduled to be deported on Sunday. The government had better act fast.

We want an explanation before the Prime Minister leaves for China next week. We know that, on May 19, the Prime Minister attended a \$1,500 dinner for Vancouver's Chinese community with the founder of a bank. On July 7, the Liberal government authorized that bank to do business in Canada.

What we did not know was that, in the space of 48 hours, the Prime Minister received \$70,000 from wealthy Chinese individuals in Vancouver for his Liberal riding association. If that is not payback, then what is?

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House many times, we have some of the strictest rules when it comes to fundraising in our country. The assertions that the member is making are entirely false, as confirmed by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. Not only that, but the Liberal Party has moved forward with the strongest standards in federal politics for openness and transparency, including facilitating media coverage, advance posting, hosting in publicly accessible spaces, and timely reporting of event details and the guest list.

We committed to Canadians a more open and transparent government, and that is exactly what we are doing. We look forward to opposition members following the lead of this government.

Routine Proceedings

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, for more than 30 years, every federal government and every prime minister, regardless of political stripe, has stood to defend the Canadian interests in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Trump administration, through a GOP budget bill, now proposes to reopen the issue with the threat of oil and gas development on the U. S. side of the shared territory of the Gwich'in peoples, where they depend on the porcupine caribou and the porcupine caribou depend on those calving grounds.

Could the Minister of Environment tell us what steps the government is taking to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

• (1205)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada absolutely supports conservation of the habitat of the porcupine caribou herd and is opposed to any development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We certainly oppose opening these areas to resource development. I have been very clear in my discussions with the U.S. administration, as has our entire government.

We recently hosted an event at our embassy in Washington, D.C., where a united Canadian position, consisting of the federal, tribal, and territorial governments, jointly discussed the importance of the porcupine caribou herd for the Gwich'in peoples and other indigenous peoples in Yukon and the Northwest Territories and our clear opposition to development in critical habitat areas like the Arctic refuge and the 1002 Area.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, earlier, in response to our questions, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance claimed that the tax policy the government introduced on December 7, 2015 raised taxes on the richest Canadians. In the interest of full disclosure, I seek leave of the House to table the following document.

[English]

The Department of Finance Canada Annual Financial Report of the Government of Canada Fiscal Year 2016–2017, page 16, states, “Personal income tax revenues decreased by \$1.2 billion...largely reflecting the impact of tax planning by high-income individuals”. That is the truth.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe the hon. member is raising a matter for debate, but does he have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify something for my colleague opposite. When he asked his question, I thought he was asking me if I had met with representatives of Diabetes Canada. I met with them this week, but I have not yet met with Autism Canada representatives, although I am looking forward to meeting with them, as well.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled “Supplementary Estimates (B) 2017-18”.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, entitled “Supplementary Estimates (B) 2017-18: Vote 1b under Canadian High Arctic Research Station and Votes 1b, 7b, 9b and 10b under Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.”

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[Translation]

PETITIONS

PENSIONS

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition calling for an end to corporate pension theft. This petition is in line with the bill introduced by my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

Workers rely on their pensions and benefits so they can live and retire with dignity. We are calling on the government to amend its bankruptcy laws, which currently allow corporations to take money intended for their employees' pensions and benefits, instead of paying CEOs, banks, and investors.

• (1210)

[English]

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the great pleasure to rise today in the House to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Hamilton Mountain who support the goals of the ONE campaign to increase access to education for girls around the world. They also recognize that in too many countries being poor and female means a life sentence of inequality, oppression, and poverty.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to ensure that girls everywhere have access to quality education, and specifically to increase Canada's funding on global education from the current \$302 million to \$592 million by 2020.

STUDENT DEBT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present e-petition 1168.

The petitioners wish to call the attention of the House to the staggering reality that there is now \$28 billion in student debt. Ever since the mid-1990s, interest has been attached to student debt. Today, a student, graduating with \$30,000 in debt, will pay \$10,000 in interest.

The petitioners ask the House to work to eliminate interest charges on the debt of students who have used the Canada student loans program and that the Government of Canada should act to eliminate the practice of applying interest at all on student debt.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because five bulk commercial anchorages, each for 300 metre long freighters in the Strait of Georgia, also known as the Salish Sea, are proposed to stop at Gabriola Island, petitioners from Nanaimo, Port Coquitlam, North Vancouver, Vancouver, and Gabriola Island urge the Minister of Transport to have the new anchorage proposal withdrawn.

They cite the risks from oil spills, catastrophic storms, impacts on commercial and sport fishing, and tourism in the area. We urge the government to take their advice.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sometimes I get asked if signing a petition makes a difference, but the 30,984 people who signed e-petition 983, asking the Liberals to reverse their decision to end Friday sittings and have the Prime Minister attend QP only once a week, made a difference by forcing them to reverse their decision.

With that and on a Friday, I am pleased to table this petition, led by Kerri Frank, with my deep thanks to her and to all those who signed.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions on behalf of constituents in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk.

The first petition is from constituents who are concerned about the insufficient amount of funding available for global education for girls. The petitioners call upon the government to increase Canada's funding on global education to \$592 million by 2020.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from constituents who are deeply concerned about clause 14 of Bill C-51. As it stands, clause 14 would remove the only provision in the Criminal Code that directly protects the rights of individuals to freely practise their religion, whatever that religion may be.

The petitioners call on the government to remove clause 14 from the legislation and to protect the religious freedom of all Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was miracle day in the Ferguson and Lashbrook household. Three years ago, Doug Ferguson, a constituent in London North Centre, was able to live because he received a liver transplant. He can now enjoy life with Laurie, his wife, Sarah, Erika, and Duncan.

I stand to present e-petition 1155, the result of Erika, his step-daughter's very hard work on this. She gathered 680 signatures on her own. It encourages more Canadians to consider organ donation. I applaud Erika's work.

I salute the family for all the work it is doing to improve knowledge of this important issue. Doug is an outstanding community member and we are very fortunate to have him.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the following questions will be answered: Questions Nos. 1230, 1231 and 1236.

[Text]

Question No. 1230—**Mr. Garnett Genuis:**

With regard to expenditures on private security firms in Myanmar: (a) which private security firms have been utilized in Myanmar since January 1, 2017; (b) what specific actions is the government taking to ensure that private security forces receiving government expenditures do not participate in violence against Rohingyas or other minorities; (c) is the government aware of any firms referred to in (a) participating in violence against Rohingyas or other minorities; and (d) if the answer to (c) is affirmative, what specific actions did the government take against such firms?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), since January 1, 2017, the Embassy of Canada to Myanmar in Yangon has utilized one private security firm, IDG Myanmar Co. Ltd.

With regard to (b), as part of the embassy's due diligence process in contracting a security firm to provide a security guard for the embassy, market research is conducted to identify capable suppliers, which includes but is not limited to referrals from other embassies or international organizations, and online and local research. IDG has provided and provides security services in Myanmar including guarding services and security training to the UN, EU, the Norwegian Embassy, and the British Embassy. Positive recommendations have been received from the UN and the Norwegian Embassy. The contract award is based on predetermined evaluation criteria and methods of selection assessing several areas such as experience, capacity, capability, transition plan, and price. The contracted security firm, IDG Myanmar Co. Ltd, has provided effective, professional security services for the embassy since its opening in 2014.

Routine Proceedings

Contract clauses used within Global Affairs Canada ensure that security providers must be in compliance with local law and that they abide by specific governance and ethics clauses including anti-terrorism and international sanctions. Canada may terminate this contract, or reduce or suspend any payments under it if the contractor fails to honour the provisions within these clauses. These contracts are also subject to the integrity provisions policy and directive.

IDG Myanmar Co. Ltd is part of the IDG group of international security companies, a member in good standing of the International Code of Conduct Association, ICoCA, for private security companies. ICoCA member companies must submit to ongoing and independent monitoring, auditing, and verification of conduct, including adherence to international human rights standards.

With regard to (c) and (d), we have no indication that IDG Myanmar Co. Ltd has participated in violence against the Rohingyas or other minorities.

Question No. 1231— Mr. Guy Lauzon:

With regard to the decision to exclude Ottawa from the Innovation Superclusters Initiative: (a) why was Ottawa not included on the list of superclusters; and (b) what specific criteria did Ottawa fail to meet?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to part (a), the selection of applications for the innovation superclusters initiative involves a two-phase process. In the first phase, which closed on July 24, 2017, applicants submitted letters of intent. The intake was very competitive, with the government receiving over 50 applications from interested applicants from all regions of Canada including British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, the Atlantic, and the North and from across highly innovative industries such as clean technology, advanced manufacturing, digital technology, health/bio-sciences, clean resources, and agri-food, as well as infrastructure and transportation.

The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada announced a short list of nine proposals on October 12, 2017. These selected applicants have been invited to submit a full application by November 24, 2017. The application process is ongoing and a final decision has not been made.

Descriptions of the assessment criteria and process, reflecting key elements contributing to program outcomes, are published in the program guide. They are used to assess the potential of proposals to generate economic impact and industrial benefits for Canada, as well as other key elements such as the importance and relevance of the applicant's proposed plans.

With regard to part (b), each letter of intent received was screened for eligibility. Eligible applications were assessed against selection criteria: vision and mission for supercluster, economic growth and industrial benefits, capabilities and assets, and budget and financial commitment.

The strongest proposals were those that best demonstrated a clearly defined and common vision for building a business-led cluster, setting their cluster apart by building on the best of its assets and making the cluster more than the sum of its parts; strong potential to accelerate economic growth and achieve industrial benefits in highly innovative industries; unique capabilities and

potential to position Canada for global leadership in a particular field; scale and critical mass, bringing together a large number of interested organizations, and securing or demonstrating potential to secure financial commitment from the private sector.

Recognizing that there were many good proposals and interesting ideas presented beyond those that were shortlisted, all lead applicants on non-selected proposals received calls from program officials to discuss how Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada and its portfolio partners might continue working together with proponents. The goal of these conversations has been to find new partnerships, programs, and avenues to maintain the applicants' momentum and advance the issues of greatest interest to their member firms and organizations.

Question No. 1236—Mr. Ron Liepert:

—With regard to the tweet by the Prime Minister on October 11, 2017, that “Let me be blunt: we are not going to tax anyone's employee discounts”: (a) are all employee discounts exempt from taxation; (b) if the answer to (a) is negative, what specific discounts are subject to taxation; and (c) have specific instructions been given to the Canada Revenue Agency not to tax employee discounts, and if so, what was the exact text of the instructions?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to parts (a) and (b), the Income Tax Act, ITA, states that, with certain exceptions, “the value of ... benefits of any kind whatever received or enjoyed ... in respect of, in the course of, or by virtue of an office or employment” be included in income. To assist with the interpretation of the ITA, the CRA has a long-standing administrative policy that states that employee discounts on merchandise are generally not taxed, except in certain situations when a discount on merchandise is included in income. This policy is explained in T4130, “Employers' Guide: Taxable Benefits and Allowances”, as follows:

If an employer sells merchandise to an employee at a discount, the benefit the employee gets from the discount is not usually taxable except in the following situations:

- The employer makes a special arrangement with an employee or a group of employees to buy merchandise at a discount.
- The employer makes an arrangement that allows an employee to buy merchandise (other than old or soiled merchandise) for less than the employer's cost.
- The employer makes a reciprocal arrangement with one or more other employers so that employees of one employer can buy merchandise at a discount from another employer.

Routine Proceedings

If an employer provides a subsidized meal to an employee, the CRA does not consider these meals a taxable benefit if the employee pays a reasonable charge. A reasonable charge is one that covers the cost of the food, its preparation, and service. Employees are also, in most cases, not taxed if they receive a meal when they work the occasional overtime shift.

With regard to part (c), on October 10, 2017, the Minister of National Revenue asked officials to clarify the wording of discounts on merchandise to ensure taxpayers are provided with clear and concise information in Folio S2-F3-C2, "Benefits and Allowances Received from Employment". As a result, the CRA removed the folio from its website and is reviewing the folio's wording regarding discounts on merchandise.

* * *

•(1215)

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Furthermore, if the government's response to Questions Nos. 1229 and 1232 to 1235 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1229—**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet:**

With regard to social infrastructure funding and other investments to address housing and homelessness: (a) how much has been allocated per fiscal year from 2011-12 to 2027-28, overall and broken down by province or territory for (i) the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (ii) the doubling of the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (iii) affordable housing for seniors, (iv) shelters for victims of family violence, (v) renovations and retrofits of social housing, (vi) rental subsidies for housing administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), (vii) northern and Inuit housing in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, (viii) Inuit housing in Nunavik, Inuvialuit and Nunatsiavut, (ix) housing in First Nations communities, (x) on-reserve shelters for victims of family violence, (xi) the Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund, (xii) affordable rental housing funding, (xiii) assistance for homeowners affected by pyrrhotite, (xiv) the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xv) the renewed Federal-Provincial-Territorial Partnership in Housing, (xvi) the new National Housing Fund, (xvii) targeted support for Northern housing, (xviii) targeted housing support for Indigenous Peoples not living on-reserve, (xix) making more federal lands available for affordable housing, (xx) strengthening housing research and establishing a housing statistics framework; (b) to date, what amounts have actually been spent or are the subject of a funding agreement for each fiscal year from 2011-12 to 2027-28, overall and broken down by province or territory for (i) the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (ii) the doubling of the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (iii) affordable housing for seniors, (iv) shelters for victims of family violence, (v) renovations and retrofits of social housing, (vi) rental subsidies for CMHC-administered housing, (vii) northern and Inuit housing in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, (viii) Inuit housing in Nunavik, Inuvialuit and Nunatsiavut, (ix) housing in First Nations communities, (x) on-reserve shelters for victims of family violence, (xi) the Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund, (xii) affordable rental housing funding, (xiii) assistance for homeowners affected by pyrrhotite, (xiv) the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xv) the renewed Federal-Provincial-Territorial Partnership in Housing, (xvi) the new National Housing Fund, (xvii) targeted support for Northern housing, (xviii) targeted housing support for Indigenous Peoples not living on-reserve, (xix) making more federal lands available for affordable housing, (xx) strengthening housing research and establishing a housing statistics framework; (c) on what dates does funding come into effect and terminate, broken down by province

or territory, for (i) the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (ii) the doubling of the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (iii) affordable housing for seniors, (iv) shelters for victims of family violence, (v) renovations and retrofits of social housing, (vi) rental subsidies for CMHC-administered housing, (vii) northern and Inuit housing in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, (viii) Inuit housing in Nunavik, Inuvialuit and Nunatsiavut, (ix) housing in First Nations communities, (x) on-reserve shelters for victims of family violence, (xi) the Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund, (xii) affordable rental housing funding, (xiii) assistance for homeowners affected by pyrrhotite, (xiv) the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xv) the renewed Federal-Provincial-Territorial Partnership in Housing, (xvi) the new National Housing Fund, (xvii) targeted support for Northern housing, (xviii) targeted housing support for Indigenous Peoples not living on-reserve, (xix) making more federal lands available for affordable housing, (xx) strengthening housing research and establishing a housing statistics framework; (d) what is the funding mechanism for (i) the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (ii) the doubling of the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative, (iii) affordable housing for seniors, (iv) shelters for victims of family violence, (v) renovations and retrofits of social housing, (vi) rental subsidies for CMHC-administered housing, (vii) northern and Inuit housing in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, (viii) Inuit housing in Nunavik, Inuvialuit and Nunatsiavut, (ix) housing in First Nations communities, (x) on-reserve shelters for victims of family violence, (xi) the Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund, (xii) affordable rental housing funding, (xiii) assistance for homeowners affected by pyrrhotite, (xiv) the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xv) the renewed Federal-Provincial-Territorial Partnership in Housing, (xvi) the new National Housing Fund, (xvii) targeted support for Northern housing, (xviii) targeted housing support for Indigenous Peoples not living on-reserve, (xix) making more federal lands available for affordable housing, (xx) strengthening housing research and establishing a housing statistics framework; (e) how much funding has been invested in or allocated to existing social housing under long-term arrangements, per fiscal year from 2011-12 to 2029-30 (i) in Canada, (ii) by province, (iii) by social housing project; (f) since 1995, what amount of funding has expired following the expiry of long-term arrangements (i) by year, (ii) by province or territory; (g) how many long-term arrangements are scheduled to expire by 2030 (i) by year, (ii) by province or territory and what is the expired amount; and (h) by 2030, what amount of funding will expire following the expiry of long-term arrangements (i) by year, (ii) by province or territory?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1232—**Mr. Colin Carrie:**

With regard to videos posted on the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada YouTube channel since January 1, 2016: (a) what are the details of expenses related to the videos, broken down by individual video, including (i) graphics, (ii) production, (iii) human resources, (iv) editing, (v) total amount spent; and (b) what are the details of any contracts, of which the goods or services were used, either in whole or in part, in relation to the videos, including for each contract the (i) amount, (ii) vendor, (iii) date, (iv) description of goods or services provided, (v) file number?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1233—**Mr. Colin Carrie:**

With regard to applications for appointments to the Invest in Canada Hub: (a) how many individuals applied for the Chairperson position; (b) how many individuals applied for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) position; (c) for (a) and (b), how many applicants met all of the required criteria; (d) what are the salary ranges for the (i) Chairperson, (ii) CEO; (e) were any headhunting firms used by the government in any way for positions at the Invest in Canada Hub; and (f) if the answer to (e) is affirmative, what are the details of any such expenditures including (i) vendor or firm, (ii) date of contract, (iii) amount, (iv) file number, (v) summary or description of goods or services provided?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders***Question No. 1234—Mr. Martin Shields:**

With regard to the skating rink currently being installed on Parliament Hill: (a) what is the total amount budgeted for the construction, assembly and operation of the skating rink; and (b) what are the amounts budgeted broken down by type of expense?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1235—Mr. Ron Liepert:

With regard to the book cover for Budget 2017: (a) how much did the government spend on the cover; and (b) what is the breakdown of all expenses, including for each expense the (i) amount, (ii) date, (iii) vendor, (iv) description of good or service, (v) file number?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2017, NO. 2

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-63, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2017 and other measures, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here we are once again with a budget implementation bill that fails to honour the Liberals' commitment to refrain from using omnibus bills inappropriately. In fact, the Chair decided to allow separate votes on some aspects of the bill.

Furthermore, there is the matter of time allocation. Once again, here we are at third reading of the bill, and we will only have two and a half hours to debate it. This is completely unacceptable, since the budget is one of the most important duties of government and parliamentarians. The government's frequent, or even constant, use of time-allocation and closure motions is completely unacceptable, in light of the promises it made during the election campaign. It is disappointing to see that the government is yet again proceeding in this fashion.

Let us come back to the substance of the bill. Often, when it comes to a budget and the budget implementation bill, you could say the devil is in the details. It is important to take a good look at what is in the budget and what is not in the budget, or what the government did not do. On that point, I will focus on something extremely important. I already raised it in a question that I asked the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Finance, and that is the issue of tax credits that keeps coming up.

Hon. members will recall one of the first promises the NDP made before the election campaign even began. It was when we quietly

started talking about the measures that we were going to propose during the campaign. We mentioned this infamous loophole that allows CEOs to benefit from a tax credit on the purchase of shares in their own company. That is an extremely problematic loophole. Obviously those who benefit from it are very well off. This situation is all the more infuriating when we consider that the government eliminated other tax credits.

I realize that some of the previous government's tax credits fall under what is called boutique tax credits. Those are tax credits that truly target very specific areas or specific people and are not always very effective.

However, gone is the public transit tax credit, which benefited families, students, and those middle-class Canadians that the government says it wants to stand up for and design its policies around. The fact that the CEO loophole stays intact while the public transit tax credit gets axed shows that there is a gap between what the government says it wants to do and what actually happens in real life.

One of the most problematic aspects of this bill is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This is related to another major file we looked at with the first budget implementation bill, namely the Canada infrastructure bank. We have heard very little about it since then.

There have been many debates on this subject in the House of Commons. Our biggest concern is that it is really a bank designed to privatize public infrastructure. It invests public money and then asks the private sector to invest. However, these investments come with conditions, and those conditions are extremely dangerous.

The public will be paying for infrastructure that the private sector will be asked to invest in. The public will then have to pay again, through tolls, for example, and will have to bear the entire financial burden of maintaining this infrastructure.

This is very worrisome. The Liberals support this approach. We know that these contracts will not benefit small or even medium-sized communities, which need infrastructure badly, as do municipalities. Instead, they will of course benefit the Liberals' Bay Street friends and representatives of investment companies like BlackRock, who attend closed-door meetings with the government about the development of this infrastructure bank.

We now see that approach continuing with this bill, which allows the Minister of Finance to invest \$480 million of Canadian taxpayers' money in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

This is very troubling because there are risks to the sovereignty of our infrastructure. It also lets them claim that the more than \$200 million allocated by the government has doubled. That amount will now be \$480 million. This is a very troubling situation.

We can also see what is missing from all of this. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about local issues, issues back home, issues that affect the riding of Beloil—Chambly.

Government Orders

In the last election campaign, one of the most important issues was whether we were going to get a commitment from the government. In fact, I made a commitment that if the NDP were to form government, we would change the law to resolve disputes between the federal government and many municipalities. Let me explain. This has to do with certain sites that are federal government property, such as Fort Chambly and the Chambly Canal in my riding.

The Supreme Court ruled on this a few years ago in Halifax (Regional Municipality) v. Canada (Public Works and Government Services). In that case, the City of Halifax and other municipalities involved in the matter argued that the federal government was not paying its fair share in lieu of taxes. Indeed, the federal government does not pay municipal taxes on land that it owns.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court agreed that the government was not paying its fair share. At the time, the federal government offered to create an advisory panel to help the decision-making process, in order to obtain an accurate assessment of the value of the sites and to ensure that the payments meet the municipalities' expectations.

The problem is that the advisory panel was made up of bureaucrats, and what it said was basically that if a municipality like Chambly did not agree with the federal government's decision with respect to the assessment of a site it owns, such as the fort and the canal, the government would just lob the ball to other bureaucrats, who would essentially make the same decision.

The bill I introduced in the last Parliament, which I reintroduced at the beginning of this one, would set up an independent assessment process to get it out of the hands of the governments involved in these disputes. We need independent assessment. As we saw in Chambly, the city commissioned an independent assessment to determine the fair value of the property.

This is something that really worries me. Why? During the last election campaign and during the debate that took place in Chambly, we got all of the other candidates to sign on to that commitment. That was at my insistence. If any other candidate, including the Liberal candidate, had won, he or she would have done the same thing.

Right now, we have a Liberal government that has not taken any action on this despite our repeated requests or the bill I introduced. We are talking about \$500,000 a year for Chambly. For a city with a population of about 30,000, \$500,000 is a big deal.

Not only is this a way for the federal government to pay its fair share, but it is also a way to make more resources available for cities so that they can offer services for residents, such as public transit, which is a free service in Chambly.

I am raising this issue because I think that introducing a budget implementation bill like this one that changes all sorts of provisions constitutes an opportunity to change the law so that Public Works and Government Services Canada is required to conduct an independent assessment when there is a conflict between a municipality and a city like Chambly.

Speaking of Chambly, there is another aspect of this bill that I find very worrisome and it has to do with infrastructure. The government and the minister responsible made announcements in Montreal and

the greater Montreal area about the REM light rail project, which is extremely important for the city's suburbs, particularly the second tier of suburbs, which includes my riding.

However, there is a caveat. We realize that certain aspects of the file need to be discussed in order to ensure that the project is completed while fully respecting the people and the municipalities. A very important request was made by the mayors of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Chambly, and here I appeal to my colleague, the Liberal member for Saint-Jean. They would like the rail network to be extended so it can properly serve the residents of the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu region and the Chambly basin.

In its current form, the project will create horrific traffic jams on highways 30 and 10. It is also important to consider urban spread and population growth in areas like mine. Naturally, we are happy that people want to move to our area and start a family. That is important, because the trend is towards population aging, and we are seeing more and more young families in our neighbourhoods.

In 2011, Marieville, one of the municipalities in my riding, was one of the top three municipalities in Quebec for population growth. In 2012, two municipalities in my riding, one of which is no longer part of my riding, ranked among the five Quebec municipalities with the highest birth rates. Furthermore, in the last Parliament, my riding was the third most populous federal riding in Quebec, thanks to its relatively young population, which ran counter to the trend.

At a meeting with members of the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec, or FECQ, I learned that the only CEGEPs in Quebec that will not see a drop in student numbers are those that serve the greater Montérégie area and Montreal, particularly the Saint-Hyacinthe and Édouard-Montpetit CEGEPs.

Given that more and more people are living and working in my riding, but sometimes also work in Montreal, it is extremely important to have a good public transit system. When it comes to the REM, one of the biggest projects ever proposed, the government must show some respect for communities and municipalities like Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Chambly. These municipalities are making a very specific request. Not only do they want their residents to be well served, but they also want to ensure that traffic will not increase on the roads used by the people I represent. That is extremely important.

I can say today in the House that we are going to continue to call upon the ministers responsible to ensure that they are listening. I am talking about this during the debate on the budget implementation bill because, although the government says that it is providing funding, funding is not enough. Respect and project implementation are also important. Of course, that will require full and effective co-operation with the Government of Quebec and municipalities like Chambly and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

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There is good news, too, but not thanks to the government. I am very pleased to say that the good news stems from the hard work of our team, my counterparts in the National Assembly, and municipal elected officials. I am talking about the Beloeil pool. Enough people signed the registry to hold a referendum about building a pool, and the outcome was positive.

The subject also came up during two election campaigns in Beloeil, including the one that just ended. It even came up during the federal and Quebec elections in 2015, because people wanted to be sure the money would be available for this infrastructure project, which is very important to the community and to the young families I mentioned earlier.

I sat down with the mayor of Beloeil, Diane Lavoie, and my National Assembly counterpart, Simon Jolin-Barrette, and we came up with a joint game plan to make sure we got the money. We got the Government of Quebec and the federal government to commit to paying equal shares amounting to \$9 million to build the new aquatics centre.

Given the parliamentary budget officer's findings and other things we have heard, and given that the government has had difficulty allocating money and spending it on infrastructure, it should not be congratulating itself for this type of bill. The local stakeholders are the ones who should be congratulated. It takes a tremendous amount of work jumping through endless bureaucratic hoops to get the money we are owed. A city such as Beloeil has a robust public sector. However, we can only imagine what it must be like for smaller municipalities, which have part-time staff, for example, and even part-time elected officials. This is not a criticism; their reality is a function of their population, demographics, and resources.

In this context, we can imagine the challenges they face when it is so difficult for the federal government to negotiate bilateral agreements and, on top of that, to spend the money. That is why I give credit to local stakeholders. I am proud to have worked with them to make this project a reality, because it will be a great asset to our community.

As I only have a few minutes left, I would like to conclude with the following remarks.

The government is patting itself on the back and saying that its plan is working, highlighting the numbers that came out on employment. However, the fact remains that social and economic inequalities are as present as ever in our society. We must address them. Simply sitting back and saying that the unemployment rate is at such and such a level is not enough, because that rate does not accurately reflect the government's record. The government's record is better reflected in the quality of jobs, as well as the level of inequality in our society. In that regard, the government still has a lot of work to do.

I talked about some extremely important local files, not to mention all the other files that need to be addressed, including tax evasion. The government merely identified billions of dollars that is missing from its coffers, rather than actually going after and recuperating it. It refuses to change the tax laws and treaties that mean that taxpayers who pay their fair share are essentially being cheated by the wealthy

and by large corporations that are guilty of tax evasion and tax avoidance.

Despite what the minister says, this is not a priority. When it is time to table a budget, these are the types of priorities a government must have if it truly wants to address inequality and have the necessary resources to tackle the big projects that I mentioned in my speech. The government has a lot of work to do.

Speaking of inequalities, I want to use my last remaining minute to mention another group that I have had the pleasure of working with in my capacity as public safety critic. They are known as the no-fly list kids. They did not get any money in the spring budget and were hoping to get money this time around.

All the legislative measures in the world will not get us a proper redress system without the necessary money. When we see the problems with Shared Services Canada and the Phoenix pay system, we are not very confident that a computer system can be implemented without adequate funding. However, I am an eternal optimist, and I hope to see something different this spring.

As hon. members can see, there is a lot to say. I look forward to hearing my colleagues' questions, but also to seeing the next budget. I hope that the government will do the right thing and actually have something tangible to boast about, instead of just half measures.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my admiration for the hon. member, who has covered a massive range of subjects in his 20 minutes, some of which are actually related to the bill before us.

I want to bring him back to his comments about his riding, which apparently is a younger riding, to ask him about a subject that he did not cover but I think would be of considerable benefit to him, which is the Canada child benefit. After his conversation about boutique tax credits, tax cuts, and things of that nature, does he in fact believe that the Canada child benefit is possibly the most revolutionary and effective way to get money into the hands of families who will actually use it? That is my first question, from a theoretical and policy standpoint, as it were.

The second question is whether he knows the amount of Canada child benefit money that has gone into his riding from the inception of that benefit in July 2016 to its first fiscal year-end of June 30, 2017.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who chairs the committee I sit on, for his questions.

First, it is interesting that he used the term “revolutionary”, because, as a Quebecker, when I think of measures that could be implemented to help families and expand the job market, especially for women, I think of the implementation of Quebec's child care program.

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I would be very pleased to see a similar system become established across the country. It would be a good start because until child care services become affordable and even if we make all the investments possible, it comes down to one way that families can have this growing need met.

With respect to families in my riding that may or may not have received these government benefits, I would like to speak about the Canada Revenue Agency. One of the Auditor General's reports informs us that the agency never answers telephone calls and, when it does, it provides false or wrong information 30% of the time. Thus, the people in my riding who would like to take advantage of certain tax measures will find it very difficult to do so.

I would like the government to resolve these problems. When it is time for taxpayers to pay their taxes and try to claim certain credits, we expect the agency to help them and to let them claim the credits rather than helping those interested in evading taxes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was probably a few weeks ago that I received a call from someone who lives up in northern Canada. They had seen a couple of TV newscasts, and the first one was about how the government was putting up heated tents at the borders for people entering the country illegally. Then the budget implementation act was tabled, with almost half a billion dollars going to the Asian infrastructure bank. He was so angry. It broke his heart. He said there are people up in the north who are freezing and homeless, and yet the government is providing shelter at our borders and half a billion dollars for an infrastructure bank overseas. He asked, "What about us?"

Does my colleague perhaps share some of the concerns of this person who called my office and is so angry about what is happening?

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I can address some of the concerns related to the files my colleague listed. In fact, I thank her for the question.

Let us start with the situation at the border that she mentioned. That is definitely a file that concerns me as the NDP public safety critic. One of the concerns raised by the union representing border officers is the lack of human resources. This summer saw a completely unacceptable situation when these people were pushed to the extreme by their workload.

I know these men and women to be extremely devoted. The government has to do its part to help them by providing them with the resources they need to deal with the current situation. This is an example where the government could have truly helped workers on the ground deal with a situation stemming from a policy issued by our neighbours to the south, among other things.

My colleague also talked about the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This ties in with the government's proposed infrastructure bank, something we have not heard so much about lately. Our main concern has to do with the fact that the government is going to use taxpayers' money, public money, to fund projects that

will benefit only the well off and private businesses. What is more, taxpayers will be asked to pay for this bank not once, but twice through tolls and fees. I think that is unacceptable. I doubt it is acceptable to the person my colleague was talking about or to my constituents.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the riding I represent, Nanaimo—Ladysmith, the cancellation of the public transit tax credit is a double whammy. It is affecting not only the people riding transit and who are now not able to claim it against income tax at the end of the year, but also ferry-dependent communities, such as Gabriola Island, where I live, including students and workers there. People used to be able to get back a bit of the fares they paid as a tax credit, which is particularly important for us in British Columbia after the former provincial Liberal government instituted a user-pay regime that shot fares up by 120% in some communities, way beyond the pace of inflation.

I would like to hear more from my colleague about the financial impact on the ground of this cancellation, and the message it sends to Canadians that a tax credit to encourage use of public transit has been cancelled by the Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Interestingly, when I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance about this, he said that in order to benefit from a tax credit, people need to pay income tax and therefore need to have a certain level of income. Basically, he is right.

When I was the sports critic for the official opposition, at the time, I often asked the government questions, either in writing or in the House, about the effectiveness of tax credits for certain sports, since some sports require a certain level of investment and therefore a certain level of income.

However, when it comes to public transit, we know that many people who have a very modest income, but enough of an income to pay taxes, use public transit regularly or for other reasons, as my colleague mentioned. Those people could benefit from such a tax credit. This is not just about students and commuters going to work. It could also include the families of students who still live at home.

When I finished high school, I took public transit and still lived at home. My mother was a teacher and had a modest income, but she helped me pay for my monthly pass, and she benefited from that tax credit. That is an excellent example that illustrates that the middle class, which this government says it wants to help, will pay the price for this tax credit being eliminated. As my colleague put it so well, public transit is good for the environment, and we want to do everything we can to encourage people to use it. Eliminating this tax credit does the exact opposite.

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Lastly, when the Liberals leave a tax credit in place that helps corporate CEOs as well as a loophole to facilitate the sale of shares, this shows that their priorities are not in the right place.

[*English*]

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by suggesting something that would be absolutely fantastic for Canadians, that when the government makes investments, we should put aside partisanship and politics and acknowledge and give credit where good investments for Canadians have been made. Canadians, overall, would really appreciate this. In fact, I think they are yearning for it.

I know that the member spoke about the importance of transit investments. Our government made a commitment to invest over \$180 billion in infrastructure, of which transit is a part. We believe these investments will be very good for Canadians and are much needed.

I would ask the member across, first, if he would agree that we could, when a government is making good investments, put partisanship aside and give credit where credit is due in the interests of Canadians and, second, whether he thinks that the unprecedented investments we have made in infrastructure are good investments.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I agree with her in principle, but what I have a problem with is when the Liberals make announcements without inviting certain members, or when they tell us that we can announce something in the local media but that we absolutely have to use a press release that highlights the name of the minister, the minister's party, and the fact that this is a source of pride for the government without giving any credit to the local stakeholders who did the work.

When it comes to public transit, we have noticed that things seem to be done by region. Funding is allocated based on the number of users, which puts some people who need public transit at a disadvantage.

In closing, I would like to say that we are the only G7 country that does not have a national, in our case a pan-Canadian, public transportation strategy, as proposed by our former colleague Olivia Chow and others. We need this type of strategy so that we can tighten up the financial criteria, rather than just throwing money out the window and hoping to get the intended results.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to follow my colleague, who is a very able contributor to the public safety and emergency preparedness committee. I did not agree with everything he had to say, but nevertheless there was sufficient there to be helpful in this debate.

I also want to inform members that I will be splitting my time with the member for Joliette.

I will focus my remarks over the course of these few minutes on the issue of the Canada child benefit and discuss it in a kind of larger context.

The Government of Canada raises revenues somewhere in the order north of \$300 billion. All of that money comes in, and then it is largely distributed to various benefits and programs. The biggest chunk of that money is distributed back to provinces. After that, it is distributed to individuals, such as seniors who get the Canada pension, and various other programs, which members are quite familiar with. It then comes down to the money that the government can actually control, because most of that money is spoken for, if you will, upon its arrival in the coffers of the federal government.

Within that pool of money that the government can direct, there is obviously program spending, such as the Department of Defence, which is somewhere in the order of about \$20 billion and is far and away the largest program spending that this government has. Then we get into some other nuances, and we have this discussion as to the best way to use funds in order to benefit Canadians. Some will argue that tax cuts are the best, and clearly tax cuts are the best for those who have the highest margins of taxable income. Clearly, in order to be able to benefit from a tax cut, one has to have a taxable income. Therefore, those who are in the high margins benefit the most from tax cuts. Then we have this beast called a tax credit. Again, one has to have taxable income in order to benefit from a tax credit. It is a contribution, if you will, to those tax credits. Usually they are kind of targeted tax credits, which are sometimes called “boutique tax credits”, and they are a bit hit and miss. Then we have kind of a refundable tax credit where, if one does not have a taxable income, money goes back.

However, the ones I want to talk about today are benefits. Some benefits, and this was particularly true of the previous government, are taxable benefits. For example, the government sends a person \$100, that has to be declared, and it is taxed at whatever one's marginal rate might be. The revolutionary concept here with this government has been that it introduced the Canada child benefit, a non-taxable benefit, which has become an enormous amount of money that has gone into the hands of Canadians directly.

The government is always fond of speaking in large numbers. The problem with speaking in large numbers is that it does not give a feel as to how much money is really going into our pockets. Most taxpayers want to know how it affects them. Therefore, on the larger number in the 2016 budget, for instance, a family with two children with an income of \$90,000 received \$2,500 more per year than they would have under the previous system. This is a significant sum of money.

However, what struck me, and why I wanted to talk about this particular subject, was that I received a memorandum a few weeks ago that set out the amount of money that has come into my own riding from the Canada child benefit. This is why I asked the previous speaker whether he knew about that amount of money.

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•(1250)

On average, the size of a riding is in the order of about 100,000 people. Some are a little more than that, some a little less, but that is a rough average. Between July 1, 2016, when the benefit was introduced, and June 30, 2017, a sum of \$101,629 million came into my riding. That is a lot of money in one 12-month segment. It is by far the biggest payment of funds received by my constituents, literally in years. I think that all members would be interested in knowing how much money has come into their ridings as well.

The point is that this money goes into the pockets of families with children. It is a cheque that arrives in their bank account. It is money that goes directly back into the economy.

I looked around for a study to arrive at a kind of economic multiplier, such as the one that applies to a tax cut. How much money does a tax cut actually generate to stimulate the GDP? However, I could not find a multiplier effect on GDP for the Canada child benefit. It is not that it does not exist, I simply could not find it. If we compare this to other forms of monies that the federal government returns to taxpayers, this is possibly one of the most effective ways to stimulate the economy.

Statistics Canada announced today that the unemployment rate is down to 5.9% and that 80,000 jobs were created in the last month. That is not insignificant. It is interesting to me, and it would be an economist's paradise to try to correlate the Canada child benefit and the amount of money that goes directly into the economy, the rise in economic productivity, and the increase in GDP. This is possibly the most direct way to stimulate the Canadian economy, by putting money into the hands of people with children.

There was an American study which dealt with a tax credit. It stated that the first half of monies are spent on groceries, child expenses, and furniture. Therefore, if \$100 came into the bank account of a person receiving this benefit, the first half would go to groceries, child expenses, and furniture, while the second half would go to paying past-due bills and asset building, such as saving money for education. That does put a lie to those who say that all it does is create dependencies, etc.

I would suggest that the single most significant economic initiative by the government has been the Canada child benefit. I was heartened in the past week to hear the Prime Minister announce the housing benefit, which is, in some respects, a parallel benefit, as it puts money directly into the hands of those who need it. That is the most important economic stimulus that we can do as a government and a nation.

•(1255)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his great speech. I agree with him that the universal child tax benefit is the best idea that has come across this country in a very long time. I am glad that the Liberals adopted that model and possibly improved upon it, although I liked the universal part of it before. It is an income-tested benefit now, which I do not think is as good.

I appreciate the member's comments, but I am wondering if he would give credit where credit is due, as it was our idea.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, it was a good half idea, insofar as it was universal. That is the good part. It was not such a good idea with respect to taxing the benefit, because that actually diminishes the benefit of the benefit, as it were.

I think income testing it is not such a bad idea. It is a pretty simple way to do things, because what we want is for the money to be in the hands of the people who need it the most. For people who are earning significant sums of money, this is just free money, and in some respects it becomes dead money because it goes into savings accounts and places where there is not economic activity, or postponed economic activity. As the study in the United States showed, of that \$100, the first half goes directly into economic activity and the second half goes into asset building. In this instance, the government has taken what is half an idea and turned it into a whole one.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's job numbers show a 5.9% unemployment rate, the best since February, 2008. This is the twelfth straight month of positive job creation and the best 12 months of full-time job creation in 18 years. TD senior economist James Marpel has noted that in the last 40 years, only one other month, December 2007, had an unemployment rate of less than 5.9%. Could my hon. colleague explain the reasons for this?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague would like me to say that it is entirely due to the wisdom and intelligence of our government, but I do not believe that. We are doing well economically. The point I want to make, though, in connecting the Canada child benefit to the extraordinary economic performance over the last 18 months is that the benefit has been in place for the last 18 months, so we are actually flowing this money directly to people who stimulate the economy.

It would be an interesting and important economic study to see what the correlation is between the Canada child benefit and the way the economy has taken off.

•(1300)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because my colleague has given some of us a bit of a challenge in terms of the relevance of his remarks, I would invite him to show us where in Bill C-63 it expands the Canada child benefit, because it is not in this legislation.

On the topic of other missing pieces, why does the budget not include any spending for new child care spaces, on which people could spend the Canada child benefit money? If we do not have new affordable child care spaces in last year's budget and this year's budget, there is nowhere for working women to spend that money.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I have two responses. First, Bill C-63, or the ancillary documents with the bill, move forward the benefit by two years. The anticipated benefit was going to start in 2019 or 2021, but it has been moved forward by two years.

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As to child care spaces, the best way to have more of those is for the Canada child benefit to be real and meaningful, providing cash in the hands of parents. Also, the housing benefit that was announced in the last week or two is money that can be directed to all of the needs of parents, who are most able to decide what is of benefit to their family.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons to oppose Bill C-63.

Take, for example, last summer's botched tax reform and the supposed tax cuts for the middle class from which hardly anyone benefits fully because a person has to earn \$110,000 a year to be entitled to the maximum amount. Then, there are tax havens. I would like to remind members that Canada signed the OECD's convention on tax evasion five months ago but still has not ratified it because the Income Tax Act is full of holes, and Bill C-63 does absolutely nothing to fix them.

I will talk about just one aspect of the bill, which is truly scandalous and has largely been overlooked so far.

I am talking about the cannabis taxation framework. Cannabis will be legal in eight months. At that time, the federal government will no longer really be involved. Quebec will be responsible for health and detox services. Quebec will be responsible for education and prevention. Quebec will be responsible for the administration of justice. Quebec and the municipalities will be responsible for public safety and security. In short, Quebec will be stuck with all of the responsibilities and the costs, and it will cost a lot. All that Ottawa is going to do is issue the production licences. That does not cost a penny. This is how the bill is drafted, and Ottawa will be issuing permits and raking in the tax money. The provinces will take on all of the costs and the federal government will not take on any.

Part 4 of Bill C-63 has to do with cannabis taxation. It states that cannabis will be taxed "under a single Act of Parliament".

Yes, I said "a single Act of Parliament". That is what it says in black and white in the new paragraph 8.8(1)(a), as set out in clause 170 of the bill. Ottawa wants to collect all of the tax. It wants to take up all of the available tax room. That is what Bill C-63 boils down to. It cannot be stressed enough that it is the provinces and cities that will be paying all of the costs. Once the federal government gets its hands on all the money, what will happen? If we want to know the answer, all we have to do is keep reading this nefarious bill, which makes it pretty clear.

The Minister of Finance will turn to the provinces and tell them he has gobbled up all the revenue and siphoned off all the money. He will tell them to come and see him so they can talk it over, and maybe he will be able to give them back a small amount. We heard the Minister of Finance say that he might go fifty-fifty. That means 50% for Ottawa, which will have paid for nothing, and 50% for the provinces, which will have paid for everything. Even then, the parliamentary secretary says this fifty-fifty arrangement is not set in stone and will have to be looked at. None of this is very reassuring.

We could end up with a ratio like 95% for Ottawa and peanuts for the provinces. We do not know. That is the problem with Bill C-63. It allows that kind of theft. The Minister of Finance will be free to do

whatever he wants, because he will be the one setting the ratio. If this bill is passed in its current form, Quebec will just have to obey if it does not want to be hung out to dry and left with nothing, zip, zero, to pay for regulating cannabis consumption, educating and treating the public, and ensuring public safety.

A few years ago, former Quebec finance minister Nicolas Marceau coined the phrase "predatory federalism" to describe Ottawa's blackmailing behaviour over transfer payments. My good friend Nicolas Marceau, an excellent economist, was putting it mildly. We are seeing that predation happen in real time today, here in this House, in a debate being rammed through under a gag order. Under Bill C-63, Ottawa gets all the money. The Minister of Finance could decide to give some to the provinces, at his discretion and under his conditions.

Paragraph 8.8(1)(a) mentions those conditions. It says that the provinces must abide by the conditions if they want to get the transfer, but it does not say what the conditions are. That will be up to the federal government to decide later on, by itself, without having to come back to the House.

In Quebec, Minister Charlebois has started drafting a plan to regulate cannabis consumption. The Minister of Finance may decide that he does not like Quebec's plan. He might force Quebec to change its plan if it wants a share of the money the federal government gets its hands on thanks to Bill C-63. He might stop the payments if Quebec does something he does not like. This is serious.

● (1305)

Bill C-63 can say all it wants about coordinated cannabis taxation agreements, but the real story is something else altogether. Something agreed to at gunpoint is not an agreement; it is a shakedown. Bill C-63 is a weapon for extortion. Quebec has its hands full figuring out how to regulate this in terms of security, public service, and prevention, all of which Ottawa dumped on its plate, so the last thing Quebec needs is another pointless federal-provincial battle instigated entirely by a federal government that refuses to respect Quebec. The predatory federal government is taking all of the money and using it to make my people and their government do its bidding. I have had enough of the federal government shoving things like this down our throats with its mammoth bills.

A year ago, Bill C-29 tried to make Quebec consumers powerless against banks. The Bloc Québécois was unable to intervene until late in the process, but we moved heaven and earth. The National Assembly, consumer groups, the Government of Quebec, and everyone else protested loudly, and the government backed down.

There was another omnibus bill, another nasty surprise, six months ago. That time, the government was giving a gift to the private investors putting their money in the infrastructure bank. It gave them the right to ignore Quebec's laws, agricultural zoning, and municipal bylaws. Once again, no one said anything in committee, because the Bloc Québécois was not there to stand up for Quebec. Once again, the National Assembly protested, and so did the Union des producteurs agricoles. However, we lost the battle that time. It is frustrating that there are 40 MPs from Quebec who would rather clash with Quebec than defend it. We are facing the same situation today, another omnibus bill that is hiding a scam.

In the committee study, no one pointed out that Ottawa wanted to take all the money from cannabis and use that as blackmail to impose its conditions. No one raised any issues about that during the study of the bill, because the Bloc Québécois was not at committee.

Although it is late, it is not too late. We will very firmly oppose Bill C-63, and we will not be the only ones. As in the case of other omnibus bills, we will have Quebec behind us.

This time we will see whether the Liberal members from Quebec have found their backbones since last year. It remains to be seen. Time is running out.

• (1310)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have just one question for my colleague, who just got a little worked up.

Does he know how much Quebec receives every year in equalization payments?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, equalization is a consolation prize. The government is allowing all the ships to be built in the Maritimes rather than in the Davie Shipyard, which has half of all of Canada's production capacity. It is a sorry consolation prize that we are paying for through our taxes, for the most part. It is time we busted that myth.

The government is imposing a new tax, but it is the provinces that will have to cover all the costs related to security, health, and prevention. All Ottawa has to do is sit back and collect money. Buried somewhere in the omnibus Bill C-63 is the fact that the government is going to collect the tax and blackmail the provinces by holding on to all the money if the provinces refuse to negotiate.

During the election campaign, the Liberals promised not to introduce omnibus bills. This bill has 318 pages, affects 19 departments, and hides a whole host of things. Frankly, this is disingenuous. I am quite disappointed to see that the Minister of Finance is putting his party above his people.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of equalization, is my colleague proud of the fact that Quebec receives so much money through equalization, more than \$10 billion? Should Quebec not strive to stop receiving equalization payments? That would make Quebec a "have" province.

Should we not be making sure that Quebec becomes a wealthy province instead of a poorer province that needs higher equalization payments?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, all federations use equalization programs to prevent certain regions from losing their populations to regions with more wealth. In the beginning, the program was developed to help a western province, Saskatchewan, I believe. The objective is to redistribute wealth.

We know the government makes choices based on economic development. These choices benefit the banking and automotive sectors in Toronto, for example. These choices also benefit fossil fuels in the west. In making these choices, the government neglected other segments of the economy, such as the Davie shipyard, which I mentioned earlier.

Government Orders

We are talking about several tens of billions of dollars in the coming decades. Half of this money should normally have returned to the Davie shipyard. If Quebec had received this money in return for the taxes it pays the federal government, we would not need equalization. Quebec could pay.

Equalization is the result of political choices made here and of choices made at the expense of Quebec and my people. That is why we are here to speak out against the situation.

This is about Bill C-63. With all due respect to my colleague from Beauce, he could have spoken about the situation we want to denounce. The government is resorting to predatory federalism and is appropriating another tax. This is what we are condemning. I would be very happy if my colleague supported us.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take an immense amount of pride in the province of Quebec. In fact, my heritage goes back to the province of Quebec. I have had the opportunity to travel there on a number of occasions.

One of the things I really appreciate, and it does not matter what province one goes to, is that we have such a wonderful health care system. Yes, there is room for improvement. It could always be better. I am wondering if my colleague across the way would also acknowledge just how much the people of Canada genuinely appreciate our health care. That is why the health care accords with the provinces was so critically important.

* * *

• (1315)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

BILL C-58—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, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the third reading stage of Bill C-58, an act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

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.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2017, NO. 2

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-63, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2017 and other measures, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are again moving closure. That is appalling. They said they would do things differently. It is really disappointing.

Government Orders

In response to my colleague's comments, we should be proud of our health system. A member of my family just underwent serious surgery, and I saw for myself the support provided to patients at the new CHUM.

I would like to remind members that, historically, half of the support for health services was to be provided by the federal government. That support has diminished over the years. The small amounts of money added recently are not nearly enough. This points to the problem of the fiscal imbalance and the difficulty the provinces have funding the health system properly.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 1:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, November 28, 2017, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

Pursuant to Standing Order 69.1, the first question is on clause 48 in relation to agricultural and fisheries co-operatives.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this clause?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on clause 48 stands deferred.

[*English*]

The next question is on clauses 139 and 163 in relation to the GST/HST rebate for public service bodies. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt these clauses?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on clauses 139 and 163 stands deferred.

The next question is on clauses 165 to 168 in relation to beer made concentrate. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt these clauses?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of these clauses will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on clauses 165 to 168 stands deferred.

The next question is on clause 261 in relation to the discharge of debt. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this clause?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of this clause will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on clause 261 stands deferred.

The next question is on the remaining elements of the bill. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the remaining elements of the bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No

The Acting Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the remaining elements of the bill will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

Private Members' Business

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

And five or members having risen:

The Acting Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on the remaining elements of the bill stands deferred.

● (1320)

Pursuant to Standing Order 45 the recorded divisions stand further deferred until Monday, December 4, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous support to call the time 1:30 p.m. so we could begin private members' hour.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, when we forced the vote, which is obviously at the heart of the work we do here, heckled across the way "Jagmeet made me do it". I am not quite sure what he was implying, what was being insinuated. I do not find it particularly appropriate, so I would ask that he either clarify or withdraw that inane comment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if I offended anyone with an inappropriate heckle, I would apologize for doing that.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACT

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC) moved that Bill C-378, An Act to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs Act (fairness principles), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today in the House to speak about my private member's bill, Bill C-378. I stand in the House on behalf of the millions of men and women who have fought for our country, the 700,000 veterans. It is for them that I rise with respect to this bill.

I also rise with an understanding that the sacrifices that have been made by those men and women and their families throughout the course of Canadian history is what allows all of us who sit in our symbol of democracy the privilege to do so. I want to thank them, their families, and their memories. I hope by the time I am done here today, I will have done a good enough job explaining what the private member's bill is all about and ask for the support of the House for it.

I am looking to establish three basic principles within the Department of Veterans Affairs Act: that the person, as well as his or

her dependants or survivors, is to be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness; that the uniqueness of a person's professionalism, obligations, and sacrifices such a profession demands also impacts the experiences of the individual's family; and that any decision regarding the care, treatment, and re-establishment in civilian life of the person and the benefits to be provided be made in a timely manner.

It is in the spirit of Sir Robert Borden, who spoke to Canadian soldiers preparing for that great battle of Vimy Ridge, that Bill C-378 is introduced. Our eighth prime minister said to the troops at the time:

...you need have no fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service...The government and the country will consider it their first duty to prove to the returned men its just and due appreciation of the inestimable value of the services rendered to the country...

Sir Robert Borden may have been the first to talk about an obligation and duty, but he has not been the last. Veterans and current members of the Canadian Armed Forces who I met with this summer told me they wished to see these principles in place.

Over the summer, I had the opportunity to travel across the country to meet with veterans, their families, and stakeholders. Every single one of them talked about this sacred obligation, this covenant, on behalf of the government and its service men and women. When Sir Robert Borden spoke of that obligation to Canadian soldiers, there has never been an obligation to the men and women and their families enacted in Canadian legislation, and that is what I hope to change with Bill C-378.

This is not an indictment on any government. It is not an indictment on the current government and it is not an indictment on the valuable employees who work at Veterans Affairs Canada. This is about doing something for which veterans have asked.

The previous government brought in a Veterans Bill of Rights in 2007. Under the Veterans Bill of Rights, veterans have the right to take part in discussions that involve them and their families, have someone with them to support them when they deal with Veterans Affairs, to receive clear, easy-to-understand information about programs and services in English and French, as set out in the Official Languages Act, and have their privacy protected, as set out in the Privacy Act.

● (1325)

More importantly, the Veterans Bill of Rights has two rights that are included as principles in Bill C-378. The first principle is that the person be treated with respect, dignity, fairness, and courtesy, the benefits and services as set in our published service standards, and knowing one's appeal rights.

Canada had the Veterans Bill of Rights, but it is the 2011 armed services covenant from the United Kingdom, Prime Minister David Cameron, that was the gold standard, and continues to be the gold standard, for stating a nation's obligation to its forces.

Private Members' Business

Highlights in the U.K. armed forces covenant include that they, the men and women and their families, “deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.” It says in that covenant, “the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army, and the Royal Air Force, together with their families.” They “should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.”

It is also important to understand that the United Kingdom is the only country in the world that has a covenant with its service men and women.

I am proud of Bill C-378 and the principles that our armed forces members and veterans are asking for. I would like to take some time to go through the three principles. The first principle states, “that the person, as well as their dependants or survivors, is to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.” This respect is duly earned, as the men and women who defend our democracy essentially go to work in a theatre of war where those they are battling do not recognize the rights and freedoms that Canadians expect to have.

Canadians would not have those rights and freedoms without the efforts of our brave soldiers and the sacrifices they have faced on battlefields for the past 150 years. In the words of Aaron Bedard, a veteran and someone I now consider a friend, about fairness, respect, and dignity, “I know that the principles of fairness, respect and dignity towards Canadian veterans are as important to [Canadians] as they are for veterans and our families.” I believe that in all that I am. It was Sir Robert Borden who first touched on the idea of obligation because of the duty performed by our Canadian Forces.

The second principle of Bill C-378 states that we should recognize “the uniqueness of the person's professionalism”, and “the obligations and sacrifices”, such as that a profession “demands also impacts the experiences of their family”.

It was only in recent years where the duty of a soldier's family has been recognized. This recognition is long overdue. For far too many years, families along with veterans suffered in silence with what was at first called “shell shock”, which we know now as the unseen injury of post-traumatic stress disorder.

On that note, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George has passed Bill C-211 in the House. It has been 168 days that legislation has been in the Senate, and it is time that the bill be passed in the Senate.

In many veterans affairs committee meetings, it was the spouse or a family member that spoke out about their roles in keeping their father, brother, mother, sister alive after returning from theatres of war. Bill C-378, if passed, will forever recognize the uniqueness and obligations of not only the veterans who fought, but the families of the soldiers and our veterans.

More important is the third principle, “that any decision regarding the care, treatment or re-establishment in civil life of the person and the benefits to be provided to them be made in a timely manner.”

Many discussions in the House and in committee revolve around the care that our veterans receive. In some cases, Veterans Affairs

does well, and I commend the men and women who work in VAC offices across Canada, in call centres, and in the Charlottetown headquarters, for the work that they do.

However, there must be a recognition that there are cases where gaps are located and the standard of service cannot be met.

● (1330)

The idea of providing benefits in a timely manner must be considered in all aspects of the care received by our veterans when they are transitioning to civilian life. There is a standard of care, but there are way too many gaps right now causing delays. We can do better, and we must do better.

Dave Bona, a veteran and mefloquine survivor said it best when he stated:

When a soldier comes home all they ask for is to have the services and medical care they need available in a timely manner for themselves and their family. Having these reasonable principles in the act will set in place the simple obligation that we ask for.

The obligation is that care be provided when it is needed, not six, seven, 10, or 12 months after it is asked for. The obligation of getting care to veterans rests with Veterans Affairs Canada. Service provision in a timely manner does not mean using an average of 16 weeks to deliver services within, for example, but giving a realistic expectation to veterans and their families of the different care that will be delivered in varying circumstances. The principle of receiving care in timely manner takes the idea of “in a timely manner” from being aspirational to being realistic and expected. It also puts it in legislation. As research improves how care is delivered, so should the timing of when that care is delivered.

As I said, last summer I had an opportunity to travel the country with the members for Yorkton—Melville and Souris—Moose Mountain, and met with veterans and their families. I met with a Robert Gagnon, a veteran walking across B.C. to help veterans suffering from PTSD. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, we talked with the women and men who run the military family resource centres. I met with Medric Cousineau, who has saved 99 lives by pairing veterans with trained service dogs. In Calgary, we learned the incredible story of how the police are helping our homeless veterans. In Edmonton, we met with CAF members and veterans together, and in that meeting, a colonel helped one veteran get off the street after hearing his story at that round table.

I give all of the credit for the three principles in Bill C-378 to everyone we met this summer. It is the veterans and their families, the MFRC staff, and the volunteers and activists who helped get this bill to the House today.

I hope all members of the House will support this bill and get Bill C-378 to committee, where more voices of veterans and their families can be heard on these important principles and the need to get them put into legislation.

Private Members' Business

Finally, as I close, I will give the last words to Don Sorochan, a lawyer from Vancouver, B.C. He wrote to me and said:

I welcome this Bill to further recognize the Military Covenant. Throughout our history Canadians have put life and limb on the line to serve Canada. The Covenant is Canada's promise that in return for this service to protect our country and its democratic institutions, those who serve and their dependents will be honoured, respected and looked after by a grateful nation. The implementation of this Covenant should not be left to the whims of bureaucrats or the other pressing demands of the government of the day.

It is important to understand that this obligation is not just to be placed on the current government, this minister, or the bureaucracy. This covenant is to be placed on future generations, future governments, future ministers, future bureaucrats, and future parliamentarians, who understand the sacred obligation, the covenant that Canada should have, needs to have and, hopefully, will have with its veterans.

● (1335)

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend across the way for his obvious profound interest in the welfare and well-being of our veterans. That has been noted at the veterans committee.

In light of what is presented here in Bill C-378, does my my friend across the way feel that we are taking steps at the moment in treating veterans with dignity, respect, and fairness, with the work that the government and committee are doing? Does my colleague feel that progress is being made as we speak, in addition to what he is calling for in this bill?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his question. We did spend time on the veterans affairs committee, and my role was critic for veterans affairs, and I will say that the committee worked very well.

As I travelled the country, I heard of gaps, and there really seems to be a distinct line that is drawn between those who have been satisfied with the services of government and those who have not. However, one thing I am hoping to establish with these principles within the Department of Veterans Affairs Act is that understanding of that obligation and those principles that I talked about.

In past governments, there were significant investments, and the current government has made investments, which I will acknowledge, but there is still so much more than we can do to better serve our veterans. By establishing these principles of this covenant, it will be held for all governments, the current government and future governments, to abide by those principles.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank our colleague for Barrie—Innisfil. He is a very humble gentleman who is passionate about looking after our veterans and first responders. From the very first day that we met here in the House, he has been passionate about doing whatever we can to look after our veterans.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our hon. colleagues for Souris—Moose Mountain and Yorkton—Melville who, along with our colleague for Barrie—Innisfil, went from coast to coast to coast talking to our veterans over the course of the summer.

I specifically want to thank the member, because in his speech, he mentioned a dear friend of mine, Robert Gagnon, who is a

constituent and a veteran who felt that Canada really did not care about veterans when they came back. The member spent time with him, and for the first time in a very long time, made my constituent feel proud about his service and proud to be a Canadian. As he was on his PTSD walk, the member talked with and engaged with him. Again, I just want to give the member my very heartfelt thanks.

I am hoping my hon. colleague might be able to share more stories that he heard when he and our colleagues went coast to coast to coast speaking with veterans.

● (1340)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, it was an incredible summer engaging with so many families and stakeholders right across the country. I heard stories, which were very similar, of the hardships they faced as they fought for Canada and of some of those hardships they faced coming back.

I do not look at this proposed legislation through a lens of political partisanship. It should be incumbent upon all of us, whether we are Conservative, Liberal, NDP, or any other recognized party in this country, that we should do our best for our veterans. I think that is what Canadians want. In fact, I know that is what Canadians want. They want us, as a matter of priority, to make sure that our veterans are looked after.

There are so many stories that I could tell, and there were a lot of tears as well over the summer. Meeting with those veterans and their families really put me on this path. With the proximity that I have in my riding to Base Borden, the relationships that I have there are really a significant part of my life.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to debate Bill C-378, an act to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs Act.

I want to thank the member for Barrie—Innisfil for his advocacy on behalf of veterans. It is a real pleasure working with him on the committee for veterans affairs.

I do not think that there is a person here today who does not want what is best for Canada's veterans. I know that the Government of Canada respects what veterans have done for this country, and will ensure that those with service-related pain and suffering will be well cared for and supported for life.

[*Translation*]

In hindsight, it is no secret that the new veterans charter introduced in 2006 was not completely successful. Some parts of it worked, but many others did not. The matter of the transition back to civilian life was never properly addressed.

When the Liberal government took office in 2015, the Prime Minister clearly indicated that the time had come to fix that. Veterans and their families deserve our respect and gratitude, and the existing system needed a major overhaul to create a process that is easy to access, simple to navigate, and focused on the veteran.

Private Members' Business

[English]

To accomplish this, he tasked the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence with an aggressive mandate, with 20 commitments that focused on three clear points.

First, the veteran must be at the centre of everything that Veterans Affairs Canada does. Second, we have to work harder to include the veteran's family in all planning, benefits, and services. Third, we have to do whatever we can to help every veteran reach their new normal.

A big step forward in achieving these goals is to regain the trust of Canada's veteran community, which is something the department has been making strides in by engaging with veterans and taking action. I have personally travelled to 12 wings and bases since March, and I have talked to our troops, veterans, and their families about how we can work together to get this right. As part of a military family, I believe it is important to listen to our veterans, our Canadian Armed Forces members, and their families, and I will always be willing to do so.

Veterans Affairs Canada has held stakeholder summits and working groups, has created six ministerial advisory groups, and has listened to concerns, ideas, and suggestions from veterans and veteran stakeholders from across the country. That feedback helped lead to our delivering on six mandate commitments in 2016, and to the initiatives that were introduced in budget 2017 that will deliver on eight more.

• (1345)

[Translation]

In budget 2016, the government committed to investing \$5.7 billion over six years to restore critical access to services, ensure the long-term financial security of veterans with disabilities, and honour the service, sacrifice, and achievements of those who served in our military.

Budget 2017 provides for a comprehensive set of measures to recognize the important role of caregivers, help more families, support mental health, and pay for the education and training veterans need to find a job.

That includes the implementation of eight measures totalling \$624 million over six years.

[English]

Our work continues as we enhance the financial security and wellness elements of the new veterans charter to help veterans and their families transition to post-military life and make choices about what they want to do next, whether it be work, education, or other activities.

There is no doubt that our government has worked hard to provide veterans and their families with the care and support they need, and to commemorate those who served, all in line with the principles laid out in the Veterans Bill of Rights. Applying to all former members of the military and family members, the bill of rights includes the principles of dignity, respect, and fairness, because this government knows it is due to their contributions and sacrifices that we are all here today.

As I can confirm, family should always be a part of the discussion, because when a man or woman serves, or when their sons are serving, as mine are, the entire family serves along with them.

While the new veterans charter, introduced in 2006, received all-party support, what emerged over the years was a patchwork system of policies and benefits, which made it more complicated for veterans to get the support they needed when they needed it. This was a consistent message from the veteran community, and something the department has gone to great lengths to address. For over a year, through a service delivery review, they reviewed and assessed how programs and services are delivered to veterans and their families.

[Translation]

We now have a plan to provide services that are faster, more flexible, and more responsive by focusing more on veterans when they contact the department for the first time and by providing a personalized response that meets all of the veteran's needs.

Regardless of whether veterans call, visit an office in person, go online, or send a request by mail, Veterans Affairs Canada will ensure that they get the same information and have the same positive service experience.

[English]

This type of change does not happen overnight, but we have an action plan in place. It is posted on our website. It outlines each recommendation and when it will be completed.

The department has already started making some of the important changes that will make a difference now. For example, it has simplified the approvals process for certain disability claims, like PTSD and hearing loss, and has reduced the burden on veterans. This has resulted in 27% more decisions being completed in the last fiscal year compared to the year before. It is a small step, but it is definitely a step in the right direction.

One of our biggest endeavours so far has been the guided support pilot project. Launched in a few cities, a group of veterans were identified to receive one-on-one assistance in applying for benefits and services to ensure that they are getting the most out of what the department has to offer. The pilot project received tremendous feedback and delivers on some of the recommendations for in-person service delivery. It also addresses the larger issue of veterans not always knowing the right questions to ask. The department does the hard work of navigating the system and provides the veterans with the specific information and advice they need. Veterans Affairs is currently looking at the next steps with the project in order to roll it out nationally.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Another recommendation was to bring back the client survey in order to ensure that all veterans and their families had a chance to provide feedback. I am proud to announce, on behalf of the department, that the results of this national survey are in, and it is clear that we are making progress.

Some of the results attest to the department's efforts to improve the long-term financial security and independence of veterans who are sick or injured. To restore critical access to services, Veterans Affairs Canada reopened 10 offices across the country last year, in addition to substantially improving access to front-line staff and case managers.

• (1350)

[English]

In this recent survey, 83% of veterans, RCMP members, and family members responded that they felt their case management plans met their needs. That is a significant increase from 2010, when only 24% were satisfied. Additionally, 81% responded that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the support the department provides, and many felt that services exceeded their expectations. An overwhelming 94% found that VAC staff treats them with respect. That speaks volumes for the progress the department is making, indicating that it is headed in the right direction in respecting, supporting, and treating all veterans fairly.

The issue at the core of the bill comes down to how we treat veterans and their families in their dealings with Veterans Affairs Canada by calling on the department to treat them with fairness, respect, and dignity, and to recognize the unique experience of veterans and their families. I doubt there is a member in this place who disagrees with the importance of these sentiments.

The challenge presented by the bill is how we define these principles so they are interpreted consistently and not subjectively. These principles exist in the Veterans Bill of Rights, and if they can be strengthened, we should examine doing that. I would like to see the bill make it to committee where members can take a much closer look at these principles and how Veterans Affairs can and should apply them.

When it comes to our Canadian Armed Forces members, our veterans, and their families, we will always strive for excellence and to improve our services and benefits. Indeed, the very reason I decided to run for federal office was that I felt veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members and their families were not being treated as well as they could be. With two sons serving, I know that they, too, one day will be veterans, so I am committed to working hard for them and all military families.

I look forward to working with the member for Barrie—Innisfil to make sure that we do right by our brave men and women in uniform, those who have served, and the families who support them.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if passed, Bill C-378 would amend the text of the Department of Veterans Affairs Act to require that, in exercising his or her powers and in performing his or her duties and functions, the Minister of Veterans

Affairs take into account certain principles in relation to, among others, persons who have served in the Canadian Forces or merchant navy or in the naval, army, or air forces of Her Majesty as well as in relation to their dependants or survivors.

It is somewhat ironic that this bill was tabled by a Conservative member, given that it was the former Conservative government that abolished lifetime pensions and shuttered Veterans Affairs offices across Canada. Veterans who need help in my riding of Jonquière are still suffering the consequences. Furthermore, the Conservatives laid off 900 staff at the department, forcing veterans who were leaving the department to scramble to reach case managers and receive services and benefits.

Like all my NDP colleagues, I am proud to support these changes that would enshrine respect for veterans in law, especially as it related to timely access to benefits. Far too many veterans have to wait to receive benefits because their applications can take months to process.

Currently, when wounded veterans are discharged, their benefits, services, and medical care are often still being processed, which puts them and their families in a precarious financial and emotional situation.

It can take several months before they start to receive their benefits and before they can access medical care. It is important that these women and men who fought to protect our freedom be treated with dignity. I think that their service has already caused them enough stress, so let us not make things worse for them. The government should do its duty; veterans have already done theirs.

Canadians will recall that the Conservatives are the ones who took veterans to court, refusing to admit that the government had a sacred obligation to ill and injured veterans. It is very disappointing to see that the Liberals have hired the same lawyers to make the same arguments in court.

Despite the rhetoric from a number of members on both sides of the House, both Conservative and government members, we must give our veterans all the support they need. After all, real action is worth more than words.

As a member of Parliament, I have the honour of meeting veterans and members of the Royal Canadian Legion in my riding at all of their events. With them, I travel back in time to be reminded of what transpired, whether we are talking about the great wars or about missions they may have carried out throughout their careers. This is also an opportunity to discuss their work experience and what they went through. The stories are sometimes sad, but they can also be happy.

It is also always a pleasure to participate in the Remembrance Day ceremony. I was very proud that this year, on November 11, we were able to attend a parade of members of the army, air force, navy, the Saguenay naval reserve, and the cadets. A number of veterans were there to commemorate Remembrance Day. This parade took place in Arvida, where my riding office is located. I am very proud to speak with them as their member of Parliament.

Private Members' Business

●(1355)

While I am at it, I want to talk about the work that members of the Arvida branch of the Royal Canadian Legion are doing. These men and women are very involved in their community. They take part in Remembrance Day ceremonies and other activities, and they make a difference in the lives of veterans and their families by helping and supporting them every day.

I want to emphasize the family part because family is important to people who are facing hardships or whose health no longer allows them to do day-to-day or work activities.

Veterans' main focus is on working with the Legion to promote Remembrance Day, but they also support serving men and women in uniform. I would like to take advantage of the opportunity I have today as we debate Bill C-378 to acknowledge all the work Arvida's Royal Canadian Legion Branch 209, with its president, Steeve Brown, and his whole team, has done. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the women's auxiliary members, who are always present at the activities and who also support veterans. I am proud to recognize their president, Annie Drolet, who is a constant presence.

I am talking about the Legion because the branch will be celebrating its 70th anniversary on December 3. That is extraordinary. I would like to share a little story. Arvida's Legion building needed some renovations and one veteran even mortgaged his home to get the money needed to redo the roof of the building where we still celebrate many events today. These are good people who are very committed. I am sure I will hear more of their stories on December 10 at the brunch celebrating the branch's 70th anniversary.

To come back to the bill, I would like to quote the Royal Canadian Legion, which said the following with regard to Bill C-378.

The federal government's budget has checked off a couple more priorities from the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) mandate letter, but it certainly has missed the opportunity to deliver on key recommendations brought forward by the VAC ministerial advisory groups, specifically, the need for lifelong financial security for ill and injured veterans. Budget 2017 provides vague promises and no clarity on how the government will deliver lifelong financial security for our veterans and their families.

It has to be said: this bill is a step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough.

In conclusion, the NDP supports the improvement of services and pensions for veterans and their families. These changes are welcome, but they are nowhere near enough to give them what they desperately need. Action must be taken immediately to bolster pensions and mental health programs, increase the assistance offered to families, and improve career transition services for medically released veterans.

The NDP would like the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman's report entitled "Simplifying the Service Delivery Model for Medically Releasing Members of the Canadian Armed Forces" to become policy at the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada.

●(1400)

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to stand today to speak in support of Bill C-378, an act to amend the Department Of Veterans Affairs Act.

I want to make a short comment on the speech made prior to mine. The MP for London—Fanshawe is on the committee representing the NDP and I want to say what a pleasure it is to work with her. As the member for Barrie—Innisfil said, the work going on in that committee is significant and although at times it does become frustrating as we work from our various perspectives, the amount of work being done is significant, and it is a pleasure to serve there.

The new veterans charter, we must remember, was brought in by all parties within 48 hours through the Senate and back, with the unanimous consent of the House. Therefore, it definitely needs to be labelled a "living document" and there is a great deal more work to be done. I want to commend the member of Parliament for Barrie—Innisfil for putting forward such a significant private member's bill that seeks to put into law Canada's sacred obligation to our veterans, their families, and dependants.

Specifically, the Canadian definition of "military covenant" that the member is seeking states that the military covenant "is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly." This covenant recognizes that there is no equivalent profession to that of service in the Canadian Armed Forces and the uniqueness of military service extends to the experiences of military families.

I have no connections to the military myself. I have always seen myself as a Canadian who truly supports and cares for our military. Having had the privilege of being part of the Veterans Affairs committee and serving as deputy shadow minister, I can say that my depth of appreciation and awareness has only grown, and this statement regarding an equivalent profession not existing is very true.

The bill also recognizes the obligation of the people and the Government of Canada to provide dignity, care, and respect to those members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service and to their dependants in a timely manner. Since Prime Minister Robert Borden addressed the troops in 1917 who were preparing for the Battle of Vimy Ridge, stating, "you need have no fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service", the terms "military covenant", "sacred obligation", or "sacred covenant" have been used off and on by governments and the government of today, and yet the term has not been entrenched in legislation as a form of respect to the members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Private Members' Business

Just yesterday, at the Veterans Affairs committee, the Minister of Veterans Affairs spoke about the investment made into developing our armed forces members into the best soldiers they can be and that the same level of commitment must be made in assisting them to integrate into civilian life when they choose not to, or can no longer, serve. The words that he spoke have been echoed in that committee over and over again over the course of the two years of the current government in leadership. This is not something new. It is something that we all agree to and our obligation expressed in Bill C-378 is seen as an absolute expectation by Canadians. It is a value that should be and can be documented for all to see. It should be formally entrenched in legislation as a form of respect to the members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

During the member of Parliament for Barrie—Innisfil's time as shadow minister for Veterans Affairs, I had the pleasure of working on committee and travelling with him this past summer, as he mentioned, on a veterans tour. Having the opportunity to go to Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Brandon, and then on to Dundurn, Saskatoon, Regina, and Moose Jaw with my Saskatchewan colleague MP for Souris—Moose Mountain, we heard firsthand from so many veterans about the challenges that they face. Some of it was very heartwarming; other parts of it were very heartbreaking. There is no question that a great deal more needs to be done, and veterans hold us accountable to that. Quite honestly, after talking to them face to face and getting to know them, they really do not care who is in power. Whoever is in power is going to hear from them and those who are not in power are going to work with them to encourage the government to move on with the next steps that need to be taken.

● (1405)

I just want to share a few stories that I had an opportunity to hear.

I met a veteran in Edmonton who had served for many years. His father had served in World War II and was not well when he came home and desperately tried to get the care that he needed. The veteran was the eldest of eight children. His mom was at home trying to take care of them, while his dad took care of the family financially. The veteran's dad was very ill and clearly not getting better. Thinking he had to do something, he enlisted, and began to serve. Within a year of his enlisting, his dad passed away. He told me it became his responsibility to care for the family. He gave \$25 of his paycheque from the armed forces to his mom, which I imagine was a considerable amount of money then, so she could take care of his siblings,

What he told me next, I cannot even fathom because I assume that most of the problems we hear about today are from our newer veterans, while this was some time ago. He said that when the chain of command learned that he was giving his mother \$25 a month, they indicated that they would be reducing his pay by that same amount, as he clearly did not need it.

What we have here is a culture that has gone on for some time. This again expresses why we need to put this into law. We need this covenant there to hold us to another level of accountability.

As sad as that story is, there is another side to it that I think reflects what I heard everywhere we went. Yes, there were frustrations and circumstances that were unfair in many circum-

stances, as well as situations in which the government was providing poorly and not doing the best it could do. Despite that, the veteran continued that he never regretted a day of service and was proud to serve his country. He is now in his early eighties and works at Home Depot. To this day, he wakes up at 5:30, shines his shoes, creases his pants, and goes to work. This is the kind of person we want to put this covenant in place for to show them respect for everything that they, our service men and women, do.

We are probably wiser and better off as a result of much that we do not understand or comprehend. That is why I encourage this entire House to move this bill to committee. Let us make it happen.

● (1410)

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for proposing this bill. As a veteran myself and as a member of the government side that counts, I believe, nine veterans in its midst, including the member to my right for Winnipeg North, who served in the Armed Forces with pride, the Minister of National Defence, my colleague and friend from Kelowna—Lake Country, and my colleague in the Quebec caucus, who is the Minister of Transport, in the riding right beside me in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, we are all honoured to be part of this party, to be in this Parliament, and to have served our country with pride and glory.

A number of us, only by fate alone, have escaped the hardships of war. However, we stand together with the veterans who have faced it and have faced other adversity insofar as we were all prepared to lay down our lives for our country. It is something that unites us quite deeply and unites us with members who have served across the way, indeed the extended family of those people a few generations ago, including members of the Second World War, the First World War, and other wars in which Canadians have proudly served.

This bill focuses the attention of the House on Canada's brave men and women in uniform, for whose skill and sacrifice all Canadians owe a debt of gratitude and esteem. The bill's intentions are admirable. They are goals on which this government is currently delivering.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs talked about earlier, on November 2015, this government made a commitment to restore veterans' access to critical services and improve the long-term financial security and independence of veterans and RCMP members with illness or injury, and their families.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs was given a mandate that recognizes the obligation of this government to treat our veterans with the respect and gratitude that they deserve.

[*Translation*]

From its very first day in office, the government has been committed to offering veterans new career opportunities, making it easier for them to access services, improving mental health services, and doing more to support their families.

*Private Members' Business**[English]*

In addition, the minister was tasked to work with the Minister of National Defence to ensure a seamless transition for releasing members of the Canadian Armed Forces into civilian life. Since then, this government has invested significant time and resources to ensure that men and women who have served our country in uniform receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve, all in a fair and equitable manner.

Budget 2016 provided funding that allowed Veterans Affairs Canada to reopen the nine offices across the country, which had been closed by the previous government, to open a new one in Surrey, British Columbia, and increase outreach to veterans in Canada's north. The department hired more than 400 new staff to deliver services to veterans, including more case managers.

In budget 2016, this government invested \$5.6 billion in improved benefits to veterans and their families. We increased the value of the disability award, increased the earnings loss benefit to 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary, and indexed them, importantly, to inflation.

Additionally, updates to the career impact allowance now ensure that each individual veteran is compensated appropriately for the impact of a service-related impairment on his or her career.

We also increased the value of the Last Post Fund to appropriately commemorate the service and sacrifice of our veterans, and increased the estate exemption to make it easier for the families of veterans to provide a dignified burial for their loved ones. That was just the beginning.

The department continued investing in veterans for the next year. To help military members find a new career and put their skills to use in civilian life, we introduced the veterans' education and training benefit that would give veterans up to \$80,000 to cover tuition and other costs depending on years of service.

• (1415)

[Translation]

Veterans Affairs is also overhauling the career transition services program so that more people can benefit from it, including survivors, spouses, and partners.

[English]

However, a successful transition is about more than just a new career. The department has introduced a series of new initiatives to address well-being, many of which involve family. Recognizing the vital support families provide to serving military personnel and veterans, the government has expanded access to the military family support program. Previously reserved for serving members, all 32 military family resource centres will be opened up to veterans with illness or injury, as well as their families.

A new veterans emergency fund was also introduced, which provides immediate financial relief to veterans and their families facing an unexpected or urgent financial need.

We are improving recognition and support for spouses, partners, and caregivers who provide support to our veterans with illness or

injury every day. The family caregiver benefit will rise to \$1,000 per month, tax-free, paid directly to the caregiver.

We are removing time limits for spouses and survivors to apply for rehabilitation services and vocational assistance so they can re-enter the workforce.

The department is looking for new ideas as well and is investing \$14 million over four years in a new veteran and family well-being fund for research on issues and new initiatives that may further support or improve the lives of veterans. That is in addition to the centre for excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions it is setting up.

[Translation]

Veterans Affairs and the Department of National Defence are doing everything possible to improve the coordination of pre-release services, another essential and critical component in successful transition.

[English]

We are aware that some medically released members of the Canadian Armed Forces experience delays in receiving benefits, and that is unacceptable. Under the seamless transition plan, both departments are taking substantial steps to ensure that all releasing members and veterans, and their families, have timely, easy access to the programs and services they deserve.

The vision we are collectively working toward will be to have all releasing military members have all the benefits in place before they are released. Not only is Veterans Affairs adding new services and benefits for veterans and their families and enhancing existing ones, the department has made an important change in the way it delivers them.

[Translation]

A veteran-centric approach addresses the individual needs of each veteran and their families.

[English]

As our colleague mentioned, following a comprehensive review of how services are delivered, the department's "Delivering Service Excellence" report made far-reaching recommendations to ensure that the programs are efficient and valued and meet the needs of our veterans. The department is taking action and will accomplish 90% of the recommended changes within the next three years.

[Translation]

The government is honouring the memory of our brave men and women in uniform and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in times of conflict and peace.

[English]

I do not think any of us will forget the power of the commemorations held in Canada, France, and Belgium to mark the centennials of the battles of Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele during the First World War, and the 75th anniversary of the Dieppe raid during the Second World War, all events that have shaped our identity and our country. Nor will we forget the Invictus Games for servicemen, servicewomen, and veterans with injuries or illness. They were a great success in promoting awareness, understanding, and respect for those who have served and continue to serve.

This government is committed to ensuring that all veterans and their families receive the care, compassion, and respect they have earned through their service. We have restored services and programs that were cut by the previous government and have invested in mental health care, services for families and caregivers, long-term financial security, and career opportunities, all with the utmost dignity, respect, and equality for former military and RCMP members.

As I go back to Montreal, I will be taking the VIA train. VIA has undertaken to hire veterans. I meet them every time I take the train, and I thank them for their service.

We will never cease striving to improve the lives of all our brave men and women in uniform.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

I just want to point out that the hon. member has about two minutes, and then we will have to adjourn.

• (1420)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege and honour to stand in my place here representing the residents of Winnipeg North. The bill we are

Private Members' Business

debating today is of great significance. I believe all members on all sides of the House will recognize what the members of our Armed Forces provide day in and day out. We recognize the importance of our veterans.

My colleague gave a brilliant speech talking in terms of what the Government of Canada has done in a relatively short period of time. We are talking about less than two years. Initiatives have been through the Minister of Veterans Affairs, or Minister of National Defence, cabinet or caucus. We understand and appreciate the contributions that our veterans have made over the years.

One of the most touching moments I have had here is when we see veterans sitting opposite us and looking down. If not for them, we would not have this beautiful place that we call the centre of our democracy, the House of Commons.

When we had the official apology the other day, it was very touching when what appeared to be a veteran salute the Prime Minister in acknowledging what the government is doing on another front.

All in all, when we look at the sacrifices over the years, how can we ever repay? I would suggest that we cannot, but we can recognize the sacrifices that those have given so that we are who we are as a society today.

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

[Translation]

It being 2:22 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:22 p.m.)

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